MOMENTS OF MEMORY

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WIND'S END
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THE VOLUNTEER
A VILLAGE SERMON
PILLICOCK HILL
POEMS 1912–1933



H. H. A. IN 1894

MOMENTS OF MEMORY

Recollections and Impressions

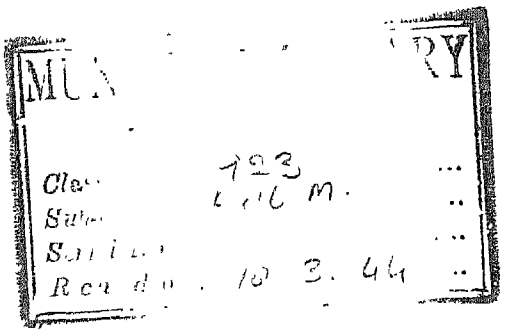
by

HERBERT ASQUITH

With 16 *Illustrations*

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PREFACE

Among these memories and impressions my father, Lord Oxford, is one of the chief figures, but they concern many other personalities, whom I came to know in a strange and stormy period. They begin during my father's first marriage, pass on through later events and the years of the War, and end in recent times.

The recollections in the early chapters are by necessity those of extreme youth, but I hope they may be of interest to those who knew my father, and may throw some slight pencils of light into an obscure part of his life. Men of his own time, who might describe this phase, are no longer alive, and of many incidents I am probably the only surviving witness. In checking the sequence of events during these early years I have been helped by some letters of my mother, and in certain cases by my brother Arthur and my aunt Miss Evelyn Melland.

In the later part of the book my memories of the War have been helped by letters I wrote at the time and the account of the British retreat from St. Quentin in March 1918 is based on entries in my diary which were made within a few days of the actions they describe.

H. A.

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Note.—My thanks are due to W. Heinemann and Co. for permission to include the portrait of D. H. Lawrence.—H. A.

Chapter I

CRICKET IN KEATS GROVE

I

In August 1877, a month before his twenty-fifth birthday, my father married Helen Melland, and shortly after their marriage they went to live in a small cream-coloured Georgian house in Hampstead, a few hundred yards from the heath. The house stood in the middle of a garden of fruit-trees—pears, apples, and a lonely mulberry, which, fine though it was, could in no way compete with that other mulberry tree that hung over the lawn of Wentworth Place on the opposite side of the road, where Keats had written his poetry sixty years before. The name of the road in those days was John Street, but it is now known as 'Keats Grove.' It was shaded in summer by the foliage of planes, poplars, limes, and here and there a catalpa; it had arches rising over its windows, like lifted eyebrows, and looked out with a friendly face, twinkling through the leaves of its trees.

At the back of the house was my father's diminutive study: the walls were covered with tiers of books, many of which were prizes which he had won at School; a brownish faded photograph of Apollo hung near the door; there was usually a chess-board in the

room, and a tin of tobacco and two or three brier pipes, in various stages of colouring, lay on the small oaken writing-table near the window which looked out into the boughs of a pear-tree. At the end of the garden was a vague declivity, which—so we were told—had once formed the bed of the Tyburn stream. During the early 'eighties of last century—the period of my first memories—there were two other children, Raymond, who was three years older, and Arthur, who was two years younger than myself, and still little more than a baby; the household also included Janet, our nurse, a benevolent Nonconformist of rather rigid principles, and Tomkins, a tortoise-shell kitten; this kitten was extremely popular with my mother and myself, but seemed to make no special appeal to my father, whose feeling for pet animals was one of tolerance rather than affection.

One of my early memories is a game of cricket with my father on the lawn in front of the house. For a large part of the 'eighties he was a junior barrister with a scanty practice, and during these lean years he would sometimes bowl to Raymond and myself on summer evenings—an occupation in which I never saw him indulge in his later life. He was rather a diffident bowler, delivering high-pitched lobs with a faintly sardonic expression, as though he were criticising the limitations of his own style. It has been said that he usually avoided the act of running: "I don't often run," were the words of his later years, but in the 'eighties, after hooking one of Raymond's round-arm balls to the leg side of the wicket, he would often cover the ground at a very respectable pace.

Haldane, then a young man, but already rounded and

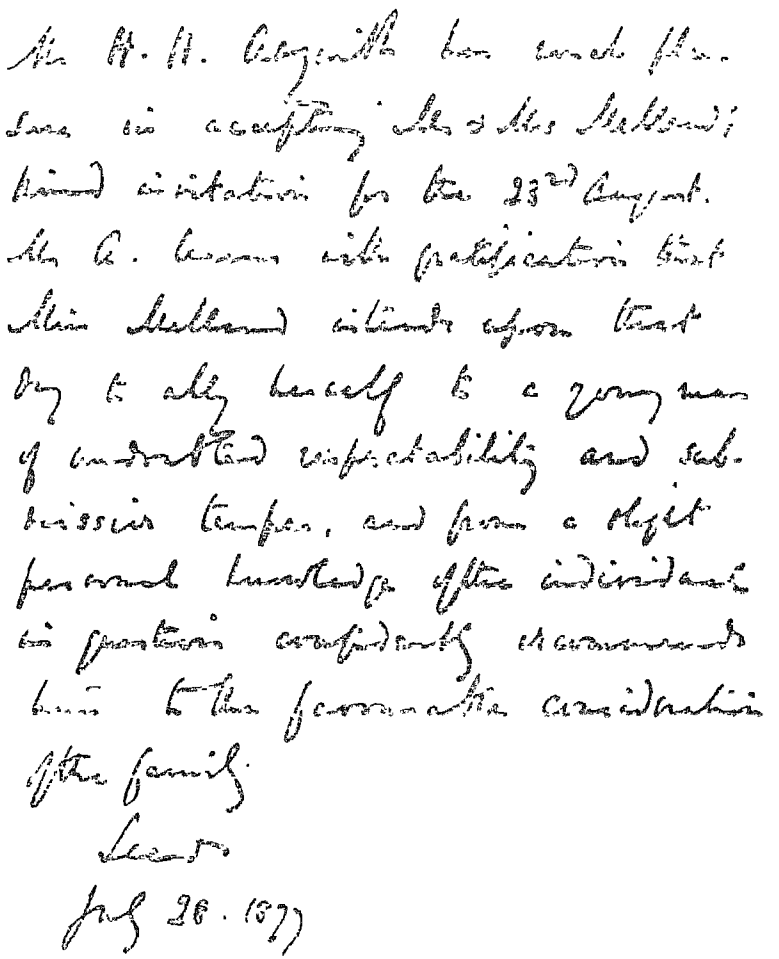
benign, with a humorous philosophic twinkle in his eye, was a frequent visitor to our house; he told me that he too had once been a bowler, but though he was present more than once at our matches, he never took an active part in them. At the time I was rather surprised by his abstinence: we had been told not only that he had played cricket, but also that he had walked to Brighton, and in those days I looked on him with admiring awe, not as a thinker or a statesman, but as an athlete of dazzling promise. One game in particular remains clear in my memory owing to an incident that happened soon after it finished. It was a summer evening and my father, accompanied by Haldane, had just come back from the Temple, a place of mystery which I had never seen, vaguely associated in my infancy with some form of religious observance. The sun shone brightly after a day of heavy showers, and shadows were thrown on the lawn from the flickering foliage of the poplars and the broad-leaved boughs of the catalpa-tree. My father bowled to Raymond, a slim flannelled figure with flaxen hair, on a wicket soaked with rain, while Haldane stood talking to my mother in the deep field, and now and then stooped to throw in a ball which had been hit to the boundary. I ran about, trying to discharge the joint duties of various fielders on the off side of the wicket—slip, point, and extra-cover.

When the game was over, my father and Haldane, his hands locked behind him and his head slightly bowed, deep in discussion, walked up and down the path beneath the old wall of mellow brick that formed the boundary of our ground. The history of later years might well have been changed on that evening: a few hours later,

after Haldane's departure, I was wakened in my bed by a grinding rumble, and when I looked out of my window I saw that the old wall had crashed down into the garden, revealing territory of our neighbours, hitherto unseen, and covering with lumps of débris and splintered bricks the whole length of the path on which Haldane and my father had been walking a few hours before.

It is curious to look back out of what was then the remote future at those figures on the lawn, my mother in her sun-bonnet, and Haldane, who in the eyes of childhood was already magnified, a hero of giant girth—the man who had walked to Brighton; and my father, a young man scarcely known to the world, with a slender figure and slightly ascetic aspect, a wide brow, a firm mouth, a humorous but faintly sardonic smile, and a clear, searching intelligence in his eyes. It is hard to realise that those two men were not really of towering physique, or that the cricket-ground, which seemed so spacious—especially in the wide vacancies on the off side of the wicket—was no more than a narrow lawn. It is curious also to reflect that, in the strange web of circumstance, the collapse of that wall a few hours earlier might have changed the course of history and that the error of some unknown Georgian architect might have destroyed at a single blow the Prime Minister of 1914 and the creator of the British Expeditionary Force, including in its possible results the fall of Paris, with all its consequences for Europe and the world. But such speculations in the haze of causation would lead me far away from the days of this chapter.

For my father cricket in these days was an occasional and momentary indulgence, and it was very far from being a fixed habit. On his return from the Temple he



LETTER FROM H. H. A. ACCEPTING AN INVITATION TO HIS OWN WEDDING

would sometimes go to his study and give Raymond a lesson in chess, or on warm evenings sit in a deck-chair near the mulberry tree working at one of his rare briefs or at an article for one of the weekly papers, or walk up and down with my mother on the path that led through the orchard trees to the bed of the vanished Tyburn.

Mr. Gladstone loomed as a great cloudy figure somewhere in the background of our lives; our nurse Janet told us—on some authority of her own—that he 'bit his food' thirty-two times before swallowing it, and urged us on, without much success, to the patient and arduous task of copying his example. Some years later my father took my sister Violet[1] to lunch with Mr. Gladstone at Downing Street; my sister, who was then a child about six years old, regarded her host with a fascinated eye: her desire was less to hear what he said than to count the number of bites that he made. But the tradition which had caused us such discomfort was now exploded: to her great disappointment she found that Mr. Gladstone's bites were neither more nor less than those of an ordinary mortal.

In the small orchard behind our house, I remember an early incident, which took place when I was about five years old, fairly clear in itself, but surrounded by the strange brownish mists of infancy. Raymond had been reading a book on the mythology of ancient Greece; we both became deeply interested in these new and beautiful gods, and one fine summer evening we erected an altar to Zeus in the long grass under the boughs of an apple-tree. My knowledge of the gods of Hellas had been gathered from a few scanty glimpses at the pictures in Raymond's book and I was

[1] Now Lady Violet Bonham Carter.

deeply puzzled about their relationship to that other God to whom we said our prayers in the evening. The altar, which was of very small dimensions, was built of brick and fragments of stone which we found in a corner of the garden, and when it was finished, I went cautiously up the stairs to the dining-room to get some wine which, as Raymond explained, was necessary in order to pour a libation. I found a decanter on the side-board and filled a glass with claret, experiencing, as I did so, a strange but not unpleasant excitement at my own audacity in broaching my father's wine. When I returned to the garden we built a pile of twigs on the altar; Raymond lit the fire, the smoke curled upwards into the apple-boughs, and when the twigs were crackling and blazing, we poured out our libation of claret onto the flames.

At this moment Janet came up behind us and peered over our shoulders with a look of questioning surprise: 'Lord-a-Mercy!' she said, 'and what are you doing now?' When Raymond gravely informed her that we were making a sacrifice to Zeus, she was much disturbed and made three or four sharp clucks with her tongue; she seemed to feel that we were performing a rather sinister rite, and she may well have been searching her memory of prohibited deities for the brief outlandish name of our unknown god.

The flames were still alight on the altar when my mother and father came round the bend of the path on their evening walk beneath the apple-trees; but when my father heard what we were about, he did not seem to share my nurse's doubts nor did he shew the least sign of displeasure at our interest in the gods of Hellas; he pursed his lips in great good humour, whispered

something to my mother, and passed on with a tolerant smile in the direction of the sunset. We had not revealed the libation of claret, but even if we had done so, I do not think his mood would have been much disturbed, unless by chance the wine belonged to a vintage year, a fact which might for a moment have shaken his balance, though even there I am doubtful, for he had then, as in his later life, a very good-natured and equable temperament.

2

On Sundays, undeterred by our pagan sacrifices, we went to church in the morning, and in the afternoon Haldane, youthful in years but already curiously mature in appearance, the tall figure of Herbert Paul, or the gay and gallant Mark Napier, would come to tea in my mother's small drawing-room, whose curved bow-window looked out over the grass of the cricket-lawn towards Keats's house on the other side of the road. In the evening I was often taken by my parents to call on my father's mother, whose husband, Joseph Asquith, had died twenty-five years before. My grandmother was small in stature; she had a broad intellectual brow, her hair hung down over her temples in long silvery ringlets, and when her face was at rest, her expression was slightly austere. When her husband died, she had been left a chronic invalid, suffering severely from asthma and bronchitis, with three children to bring up and very little money with which to do it. The courage and endurance with which she faced and overcame her many difficulties, indeed every obstacle except her health, would make an amazing story.

My father relates that she was all her life a great

reader both of light and serious literature and had an 'exceptional insight into the foibles and excellences of her fellow-creatures'. She was a woman of strong individuality, critical but humorous, and very ambitious for her sons; many who knew her, thought that it was from her that my father inherited his gift for expression and perhaps also something of his intellectual strength, and the judicial quality of his mind.

Now and then she seemed rather a formidable presence, especially in those moments when my mother called upon Raymond and myself to advance by turns and recite poetry to the old lady as she lay on her sofa, her shoulders propped up on her cushions. The poems which we recited were of rather a stirring quality, with a swing in the rhythm that made them easy to remember, and between the verses of *Horatius*, *Marmion*, or *Hohenlinden*, she would now and then give a smile of encouragement, as she stretched out her hand to the lacquered box of lozenges that lay on a table at her side.

When the recitations were finished, my father would sometimes withdraw into a corner of the room and engage in a game of chess of a most notable kind with his brother-in-law Mr. Wooding. As an ingenious nightmare experiment, a German professor had made a large cruciform chess-board constructed in such a way as to allow four sets of chessmen to engage in the same game, each moving to the attack from a separate point of the compass. The game was designed for four players; to win it each side had to checkmate two kings, and a few moves from the start there was often the most amazing mêlée when eight knights pranced in the centre of the board among the converging lines of four queens,

eight bishops, and ample reserves of pawns advancing to the assault from every quarter. With a slight sniff of his nostrils and a humorous and rather diffident smile my father would now and then engage in the tangle of this nightmare battle, that must have multiplied many times the riddles and problems of centuries, which for most chess-players are already sufficient. As a rule, however, he was well contented with the ordinary game and played it intermittently up to the end of his life; he amused himself by studying its history, but his play was very far from the professional standard and was of rather a light-hearted type: he played chess in the same mood as that in which he played bridge in later years, regarding it as a release from other activities rather than a serious pursuit in itself.

When I was six years old, I was taken to school in a little house at the top of the hill whose garden with its lilacs and acacias looked out over the crowded silver birches of Hampstead Heath. From here the heath was a wide rolling prospect; its fringes were still unspotted by the slated roofs of mushroom villas and faded away into films of grey and purplish mist that veiled the distant fields, while the northern winds above tore the high clouds into white bearded streamers and drove back the dun fog-bank that floated up from London. It was rumoured that our schoolmistress, a lady of much grace and attraction, had once acted the part of Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, a rôle that seemed scarcely in harmony with the rare gentleness of her own disposition; I was beaten by her once for being late after an interval in lessons, but it was the mildest castigation that I remember; she shewed no sign of the fury with which she was said to have wielded

her double-handed battle-axe against Agamemnon, and —I am glad to say—she inflicted it with a very different weapon.

Among the excitements of school, and not the least of them, was the fact that the father of one of my school-fellows had been presented with the cub of a lion, and when the news spread, this boy soon became extremely popular, a magnet that rivalled even Clytemnestra herself. This young lion was not taken out by its master; but I was privileged to meet it at tea in its owner's garden, where it frolicked about behind its bars like a large kitten, and on my return my mother, standing under the trees with a basket of mulberries over her arm, expressed some diffidence when she heard of my fellow-guest who had licked my hand with a tongue that felt like the rasp of a file.

In the afternoon while Raymond was still away at Miss Case's school in the High Street, my mother would often take me for long walks on the heath, or I would help her to pick gooseberries in the bushes at the back of the garden, or mulberries from the tree near which my father used to pitch his deck-chair and work at his briefs on summer evenings. When the mulberry picking was finished, the fruit was piled up by the cook in a cauldron in the kitchen, to make mulberry jam, a rare and delightful confection, whose scent pervaded the basement and floated invitingly up the stairs into the hall.

Before we went to bed my mother used to read aloud to us out of Scott, Dickens, Stevenson or Lewis Carroll; my father would sometimes come in while we were listening to *David Copperfield*, *Alice in Wonderland*, or some other work, but more often at the end of the

reading, when he would pace up and down near the window in rather an absent manner, asking us questions about the book: these questions shewed a very accurate memory, but while he was asking them, the impression persisted that a large part of his mind was engaged elsewhere on some problem very remote from John Silver, Mr. Pickwick, or the White Knight. He was fond of novels, but he preferred the more rapid process of reading to himself, and as his work increased at the Bar, pressure of time made his preference a necessity.

When he returned from the Temple in the evening, he now and then brought home with him a box of fireworks: these were intended, nominally, for his children, but he was fond of playing with them himself and certainly discharged his fair proportion. Large numbers of squibs and Roman candles were let off in the orchard on the 5th of November, and also on the evening of the 6th, which was Raymond's birthday: my father usually pinned Catharine-wheels to a post near the mulberry-tree, but at this type of work he was not very proficient, and the Catharine-wheels, after starting to revolve with a hesitant splutter, would frequently jam in mid-career, and discharge their frustrated glories after they had come to a halt. The apple-trees and the boughs of the mulberry were lit up on these nights with the stars of the Roman candles, the tails of whirling squibs, and the glittering showers of the 'golden rain,' while my mother, who thought that a squib was closely akin to a bomb, stood watching at the window, and now and then spoke a word of warning to her children. But the only casualty at these displays was my father: while he was tossing squibs over the bough of a pear

tree, one of them exploded in his fingers, creating an enormous blister, and for some days afterwards he carried his hand in a bandage.

In the year 1886 my father was persuaded by Haldane to stand for East Fife at the General Election as a Gladstonian Liberal. The invitation of the local association came on a Saturday; he accepted it the same day, issued his election address on Monday, and arrived in the constituency only a week before the poll. He told me in later years how at one of his early meetings a village audience, after hearing his speech in a Scottish silence and heckling him for an hour, resolved unanimously that he was "not a fit and proper person to represent this constituency." In fact he was returned as a Home Ruler by a majority of 376, and represented the division continuously for a period of thirty-two years.

I can remember his sudden departure and very clearly his return to his home. Our small household had spent several hours devising a flag to celebrate his victory. In its final form this banner had a white ground on which the words 'WELCOME, M.P.' were inscribed in bold vermilion letters.

Raymond climbed the catalpa tree and hung this splendid creation from a bough which spread out over the front wall of the garden, where he remained perched aloft, ready to signal my father's approach, while behind him a number of Union Jacks fluttered from the bedroom windows. At last there was a clatter of hoofs in the narrow road, the sound of a hansom cab trotting down the hill with its jingling silvery bells: my father came through the garden gate, a slender youthful figure, rather tired with the stress of his campaign, but full of merriment,

with my mother, who was never ambitious for herself, smiling happily at his side, filled with delight and radiant at his victory. But I doubt whether any of the company on that small lawn, except perhaps Asquith himself, could have hazarded the vaguest guess as to where this critical step would lead him in the end.

3

My father's ancestors on both sides came from a Puritan Yorkshire stock and many of them were Puritans of a rigidly sectarian type. An Asquith was Mayor of York in the reign of Henry VIII, while another, a Puritan zealot, took part in the Farnley Wood plot, an attempt to restore the Commonwealth in 1664, and was imprisoned in York Castle. In Morley, which was my father's birthplace, Puritan tendencies of a pronounced kind persisted into later centuries. It is related that his maternal great-grandmother had a daughter with long and beautiful golden hair, and that on the daughter's return from her honeymoon the mother, without provocation and without assigning any reason for her act, insisted on shearing it off, leaving her head as 'bald as an egg.'[1]

My father never shewed a similar tendency or indeed any inclination to interfere with the freedom of his children: on the contrary, his attitude was usually one of mellow and spacious indulgence, and his temperament in many ways shewed signs of reaction against the tenets of his ancestors and the principles of his own upbringing.

As a boy he went every Sunday in his best clothes, a youthful member of an Independent congregation, to the service in the Rehoboth Chapel, and he has related himself that both his parents were "active workers

[1] See *Life of Lord Oxford* by J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith, I. 16.

and devout worshippers." They condemned and prohibited every form of betting, and whist, even when it was played for love, was not regarded with approval. Plays were looked on as a source of temptation, of instruction in the ways of life but also in the ways of the Devil.

At our house in Hampstead things went on a merrier course, and a card-table, prepared for whist or *vingt-et-un*, which in those days was one of his favourite games, was frequently to be seen in the window of my mother's drawing-room. Not only did we face the temptations of the pantomime, but in defiance of his own youthful traditions, my father took us to the play in the evening at an extremely early age, although in those days it was a long journey from our house to the theatres: when I was only seven years old, he took Raymond and myself to see *The Yeomen of the Guard*, and I returned with my feet in the straw of a four-wheeler, buried in sleep from which I was now and then awakened by the creaks and bumps of the cab, as it crunched its way over the uneven surface of the road. It was my mother's custom, when one of these expeditions was finished, to offer soup to the cabman: she would come out of the house with a steaming bowl, and give it to the driver as he stood beside his smoking horse, and I have seen many a Bardolph nose of varying contour, poised above the steam, while its owner gulped down the contents, usually with gratitude, but, now and then, perhaps with a shade of disappointment at the thought that it might have been laced with something stronger than stock.

My father's attitude towards music was usually one of endurance rather than enjoyment, and I'm afraid his

suffering reached a high pitch when I took him—in later years—to hear the *Götterdämmerung* at Covent Garden and by a freak of ill-fortune his place was in the front row in the full blast of the Wagnerian orchestra. But he liked the words of Gilbert, and the music of Sullivan appealed to him as it passed over him with its light flickering wings.

Shortly after our visit to *The Yeomen of the Guard* he took his children to see Irving performing in *The Dead Heart;* the fall of the Bastille was presented in one of the scenes: cannon were brought onto the stage, a mob of revolutionists stormed the gates, and Irving, a gaunt and pallid prisoner whose long confinement had deprived him of memory, staggered out of one of the posterns, uttering weird guttural sounds, clutching the air with his long crooked fingers, and gripping the audience in a moment with the spell of his amazing presence.

My father often took us to melodramas, partly, no doubt, as a concession to his children's taste, but I think he had a liking for them himself of rather a humorous kind, and he would usually return in high spirits after tasting in later life the forbidden fruits of his boyhood. These amusements formed a happy change from the heavier diet of his mind, the arid contests of the Bar, and the dust of political battles.

The first time I remember going out to dinner without my parents was when I was eight years old, the host was Haldane, and the place of entertainment was a tavern in Fleet Street. Haldane was at that time a Junior Chancery Barrister, who had been about four years in Parliament, having entered it in 1885, a few months before my father; he had been

the first Honorary Secretary of the Eighty Club, but to the general public he was still unknown. Like my father, he had been without influence or connection when he first came to London and, according to his own account, lived in an 'attic' during his early years at Lincoln's Inn. At our dinner at the tavern we sat on high-backed settles in a kind of oaken pen with Haldane on one side of the table and Raymond and myself on the other. He proposed to take us to the Lyceum and suggested with a benign, philosophic smile that one should dine well before going to melodrama. The dinner which he ordered was so princely and spacious in its scale that anxious though I was to do so, I found it very difficult to stay the course to the end.

Haldane was a magnificent and generous host, lavish to his guests, and very courteous to children, treating them as though they were his contemporaries. He had not followed Gilbert's advice for obtaining a practice at the Bar by marrying 'a rich attorney's elderly ugly daughter'; but he told me that he had once performed a feat, perhaps more arduous even than this, by patiently drinking glass after glass of a solicitor's port wine in spite of the fact that it was badly corked, without betraying the tragedy or shewing any sign of emotion. After this supreme act of stoicism the solicitor sent him an important brief, perhaps as a compensation for his sufferings; this brief was followed by others, and so a connection was formed, of which in those early years he stood very greatly in need.

Chapter II

EARLY FRIENDS

I

Though my parents were tied for some part of the year to the fringes of London, they were both devoted to the country, and spent as much time there as possible, taking their children with them. The earliest holiday I can remember was an expedition to the south coast of Cornwall. When I was four years old, my mother used to take me to bathe in a Cornish cove paved with pale ribbed sand; at the end of it there was a cave lapped by the water, slanting in between two buttresses of the cliff; the rocks were of brilliant colours, splashed and streaked with green and crimson, and a great number of anemones nestled on the ledges beneath streaming canopies of sea-weed. My father used to sit on a rock smoking his brier pipe and in this position of mellow contentment he used to watch us, while we bathed, but he never shewed any anxiety to join us in the sea.

In a later summer we went to the coast of Wales. One day, when I was making a sand-castle and binding it with sea-weed, I looked up from my work and saw to my surprise the helmeted figure of a policeman standing on a spit of glistening sand with a small group of children trailing their spades and peering curiously

at some object that was lying on the shore. I had never before seen a policeman on the beach, and his stiff blue helmet, outlined against the free glitter of the waves, looked strangely out of place, as though part of the town from which we had escaped had suddenly invaded our solitude.

When I joined the group, a little girl touched my elbow: 'It's a dead man,' she whispered: 'He's drownded.' Looking over her shoulder, I saw the figure of a man lying on the sand with a white handkerchief spread over his face, his shirt and trousers clinging to his body, drenched and bedraggled by the outgoing tide. Round him the sunlight shone on the wet ribs of the sand and on little runnels of water that flowed down through the crevices of the rock-pools. For me and probably for the other children, who stood around, awed and fascinated, this was the first vision of death: but a few moments later I felt a hand on my shoulder, and my nurse led me away to my sand-castle; the group of children dispersed and were soon again at work with spade and bucket, still rather awe-struck, but feeling, perhaps, a shade of disappointment at their glimpse of this motionless form lying prone in the sunlight with the wet sand seeping round it.

During one of our summers in Wales my father, who was in rather an absent-minded mood, took me a long walk to the summit of Cader Idris, a height of nearly 3000 feet, when I was only seven years old: for the greater part of the climb he was buried in his own reflections: I think he had forgotten that he had an infant trailing behind him and he shewed signs of surprise when he noticed me standing beside him at the top. Some weeks later, on lower ground than Cader Idris, I

was walking with him along a sheep-track when a farmer of wild but mean appearance tried to bar our passage; a short dialogue followed between him and my father, in which neither seemed to understand a word of what the other was saying, the farmer pouring forth a torrent of voluble and menacing Welsh, while my father tried to explain in courteous and lucid English that there was a right of way over the fields. In this early encounter with a Welshman he obviously stood in need of an interpreter, but as there was none at hand, he shrugged his shoulders with a philosophic smile and with a curt gesture of his arm sturdily pursued his course followed by the outlandish curses of the farmer, which gradually faded away behind us until they were drowned in the baa-ing of the sheep.

Though he never acquired the habit of sea-bathing, my father was fond of sailing; during our visit to Wales we used to go out in a cutter, and I remember more than once bumping over a choppy sea in a fresh breeze to the great discomfort of some of the passengers, while my father sat in the stern, his face ruddy with the wind and glistening with spray, without shewing any twinge of uneasiness at the heeling and rolling of the boat.

At Easter and Whitsuntide my mother used to take a cottage or a farm-house near the banks of the river Lathkyll in Derbyshire. This beautiful trout-stream has its source near the mouth of a cavern and in early spring the banks above it were starred with white violets. Raymond and I used to explore the cool dark labyrinth of the cave, which penetrated a long distance into the hill, feeling our way with the help of guttering candles beneath the strange glinting shapes of the stalactites that hung down like daggers from the roof,

while my father sat near the mouth where the water comes into the daylight, smoking his pipe and reading a book, well contented with the beauty of the valley outside.

In a village on the banks of this stream an old woman kept a midget shop, famous for brown 'bull's-eyes', of a rare and melting flavour whose delicious secret was said to be guarded from generation to generation as carefully as that of the liqueurs of La Grande Chartreuse. On the outskirts of the village old Charles Melland, an uncle of my mother, lived in a small stone house whose garden was sheltered by a cliff of tufa. As I last recall him, he was sitting in his armchair in a dressing-gown, wearing a red Turkish fez on his head with an air of benign contentment; he was a picturesque figure, very charming to children, and his memory went back a long way: he could remember the British troops marching past on their return from Waterloo, and he said that in his childhood an old man at Alport had told him that he had fought in 1746 at the battle of Culloden, but at that time, if his story was true, he must have been a very young soldier.

2

In the later 'eighties and early 'nineties my father often spent August and September at Grasmere in Westmorland and for several years in succession he became a tenant of Allan Bank, a house standing on the foothills at the northern end of the lake, with its grounds stretching up towards the bracken and juniper on the rocky slopes of Silver Howe. By an odd coincidence this house was even more closely associated with the literature of the early nineteenth century than the road

where he lived at Hampstead: in Hampstead, when he sat under his mulberry tree writing articles for the *Economist*, he was within a stone's throw of that other garden, where, seventy years before, Keats's immortal nightingale had built its nest; Allan Bank had once been occupied by William Wordsworth, his wife, and his sister Dorothy, and Coleridge had come there as a guest, but if these ghostly presences ever moved my father to write English verse, no trace of it now survives.

The lease of Allan Bank was a sign of his increasing practice at the Bar. Since his marriage in 1877 the next six years—from a professional point of view—had been lean and toilsome: at the beginning of this period he had no influential friends among solicitors, or among others who might be in a position to help him, and in the absence of briefs he relied for his scanty income on journalism and on lectures delivered on the arid themes of Law and Economics at rather a low rate of pay. In addition to his articles for the *Economist* he also contributed to the *Spectator*, of which Hutton was then an editor. My father had begun his career at the Bar as a pupil of Charles Bowen, an athlete in mind and body, who had been, like himself, a fellow of Balliol and a pupil of Jowett. Bowen had won distinction both at cricket and football, and according to his brother—besides these normal pursuits—he could accomplish the unusual feat of 'jumping a cow as it stood'.[1] Bowen's success at the Bar had not been rapid, until, after waiting ten years, he had his first great chance as junior counsel in the Tichborne case in 1871.

The first turning-point in my father's career was in

[1] D. N. B., Vol. 1, p. 238.



THE GARDEN AT THE BACK OF MY FATHER'S HOUSE IN KEATS GROVE
The window of his study is on the first floor to the left just above the bush shaped like a toadstool.
(The photograph is of recent date.)

1883, and for this, as he relates, he owed a heavy debt of gratitude to R. S. Wright, the generous and eccentric friend whose chambers he had just been invited to share. It was Wright who introduced him to the Attorney-General, Sir Henry James, and it was through this channel that his name was first brought to the notice of Mr. Gladstone, who was then Prime Minister. In 1883 a gale of excitement—not unmingled with hypocrisy—was sweeping the political world: Bradlaugh had claimed the right to affirm instead of taking the Parliamentary oath, Mr. Gladstone was trying to settle the controversy by the Affirmation Bill, and the trouble was being busily nursed and exploited by Lord Randolph Churchill. Mr. Gladstone instructed Sir Henry James to prepare a note on the points of law and history involved in the case, James consulted Wright, and Wright gave the work to my father, who devoted all his energies to preparing a memorandum, which was used and highly appreciated by the Prime Minister. Asquith's name was thus brought to the notice not only of Mr. Gladstone, but also of the Attorney-General, a fact which was of great assistance to his career at the Bar.

Wright was a fine scholar and had edited the *Golden Treasury of Ancient Greek Poetry*. Like Bowen and my father, he had been a pupil and friend of Jowett, whose last illness and death took place in Wright's house. My father used to describe his habits of life, which in many points were in strong contrast to his own: Wright was at that time a bachelor, and his home was on the floor above the chambers where they did their work; instead of working, as my father often did, by sitting up into the early hours, Wright used to go to bed before 10 o'clock and rise at cock-crow to begin

his day, and he was once heard to utter a bitter complaint that it was impossible to get a newspaper before five o'clock in the morning. He was a legal hermit of a strange type, going little into society, a hard worker and a hard smoker who unless he had to go into court, spent the rest of the day in his chambers with 'a tall hat on his head and a brier pipe in his mouth.' He built for himself a house in Hampshire which was devoid of shutters and blinds, and here Raymond and I spent some days in the summer, deeply impressed by the smoke-tanned features of my father's benefactor, who was also a delightful host.

The second important step in my father's career was his maiden speech in the House of Commons in March, 1887. Ireland was the main question of the day and the occasion for this speech was the Irish Crimes Bill, then in the charge of Arthur Balfour, who had just been made Chief Secretary for Ireland. Some idea of Asquith's early style of speaking with its terse, lucid periods, may be given by an extract:

"In the course which the party opposite are about to take are they not either going too far or not going far enough? Consider what will be the position of Ireland, the condition of government in that country under the system which you are about to introduce—representative institutions upon the terms that the voice of the great majority of the representatives of the people shall be systematically ignored and overridden; the right of public meeting tempered by Viceregal proclamation; trial by jury with a doctored and manipulated panel; a free Press, subject to be muzzled at the will of officials; judges and magistrates, by their traditions independent of the Crown, but in practice and in theory of their office

inextricably mixed up with the action of the Executive. What conceivable advantage can there be either to Ireland or to Great Britain from the continuance of this gross caricature of the British Constitution? There is much virtue in Government of the people, by the people, for the people. There is much also to be said for a powerful and well-equipped autocracy, but between the two, there is no logical or statesmanlike halting-place. For the hybrid system which the Government is about to set up, a system which pretends to be that which it is not, and is not what it pretends to be, a system which cannot be either resolutely repressive or frankly popular —for this half-hearted compromise there is inevitably reserved the inexorable sentence which history shows must fall on every form of political imposture."[1]

When he sat down, it was clear that his speech had been a definite success. It had been a fighting speech: there was force and lucidity in the argument, a certain ardour in its tone, and distinction in the manner of its delivery. He gave the impression that he was not emptying the well, and that he had reserves of power. At the end of it Mr. Chamberlain with his accustomed generosity paid him a friendly compliment, but most important of all, Mr. Gladstone himself was listening.

A few months later, as a result of divided opinions on the question of Home Rule, the Liberal Party was split into two segments. My father himself considered that the formal division took place at a meeting in October 1887, at which he made a speech. "It was a very good thing," he said, "to do what they could to recover the lost sheep. Henry IV had said that Paris was worth a Mass. But they might pay too high a price even for

[1] *Speeches by the Earl of Oxford* (1927), p. 17.

the capitulation of Birmingham." This speech was described by John Morley as 'powerful and eloquent,' and again Mr. Gladstone was present.

My father's growing political prominence greatly assisted his position at the Bar: in 1887 he was briefed as junior Counsel for Parnell in the roving inquiry of the Parnell Commission into the charges which had been brought by *The Times* against certain Irish members and their leader, and in these proceedings by one of the most fortunate incidents in his career he leapt at a single bound from a modest livelihood to a wide and prosperous practice. His benefactor in this case was his leader Sir Charles Russell, a man whom he considered a genius, in a class by himself, and easily first among the advocates of his time. Macdonald, the manager of *The Times*, had been called into the witness-box and had told the amazing tale of the forged letter which it had published, over Parnell's name, a letter which stated that Burke, one of the victims of the Phœnix Park murders, had 'got no more than his deserts.'

Macdonald was one of the chief witnesses, and the natural and expected course was for Russell to conduct his cross-examination. To my father's amazement his leader suddenly turned to him and said: "I am tired: you must take charge of this fellow." Never was a moment of weariness more welcome, and—whether it was real or assumed—Russell's action was certainly tinged with benevolence and was of the greatest possible service to my father: but the task was critical and none the easier for being conducted under the fiery, piercing eyes of Russell himself, who in Asquith's opinion was the greatest cross-examiner at the Bar.

His cross-examination lasted for more than two hours and when it was ended, Russell almost overwhelmed him with the generosity of his congratulations.

My father's high estimate of Russell's peculiar gift of intuition may be given in his own words:

"Time after time I have seen Russell, with a blank sheet of paper before him, feel his way, by question after question, until he had got right inside the man's mind, and then proceed, more often than not, to reduce his evidence to the flimsiest of cob-webs. . . . His cross-examination of Pigott (the forger of Parnell's name), brilliant though it was, was a relatively easy task; for he knew beforehand almost everything that was to be known of the speckled career of that needy renegade."[1]

When Pigott dined with Labouchere on the eve of his flight to Spain, he was asked by his host what he thought of Russell as a cross-examiner. "Not bad," Pigott replied, "but you must remember what materials he had!"

Russell had a powerful and flexible voice, and his snuff-box, his bandana handkerchief and his pince-nez were all called into service with something of an actor's art, not too consciously exercised. In my father's view, though many can cross-examine when supplied with materials, in the most difficult task of all, when these were absent, and the examiner had to probe his way to the weak points in a dark and unknown country, no other advocate possessed flair and intuition in such a high degree.

Soon after the case was over, my father described to us some of Russell's methods and characteristics, and amongst other things his hurried frugal lunch consisting

[1] *Memories and Reflections*, I, 80.

of a fried sole laid on his writing table and surrounded on three sides by towering ramparts of briefs and papers. I did not meet him myself until a few years later and the incident may be mentioned as an instance of his kindliness in matters of the smallest scale. I had just gone to school at Winchester and one autumn afternoon I was engaged on the duty of toasting large slabs of bread for the prefects of the House. The bread was new, of a dampish steaming texture, the fire none too good, and I was rather behindhand with my important task, as the hands of the clock ticked on towards the august hour of the prefects' tea, when I was suddenly interrupted in my work. My housemaster's short, benevolent butler with his apple face and brown waxed moustache stood in the doorway: 'Beg pardon, sir,' he said, in a husky confidential whisper, 'the Lord Chief Justice of England has called to see you.'

There was a slightly ominous note in the butler's voice, a faint suspicion, perhaps, that the Lord Chief Justice might be after me on some matter of business, but there was little time even for a glance into my past. I was faced—at short notice—with the conflicting demands of two supreme authorities, the prefects on the one hand, the Judge on the other: as regards myself the prefects had an authority vastly more pervasive in this world, though the Lord Chief Justice might be able to dismiss me into another. With some misgivings I withdrew my toasting fork from the bars of the grate and deposited on the prefects' dish two singed and steaming slabs of bread, which were still in a distressingly pallid condition and had not yet crossed the line at which bread becomes toast.

I followed the butler down the long tiled passage to

the private part of the house and was ushered into a small boudoir, where I found myself facing Lord Russell. I was less awed than I had expected: his eyes were at once kindly and penetrating, and in spite of the rigours of his profession sensibility as well as force seemed to linger in the lines of his firm mouth and powerful chin. He asked me some terse pointful questions about life at Winchester; he possessed in a high degree the gift of putting the young at their ease, and when he departed to the Judges' lodgings, I felt in my palm the comfortable weight of a Victorian sovereign, as evidence that this strange experience which had begun in awe and ended in relief, had not been entirely a dream.

Chapter III

GRASMERE AND LONDON

I

My father was a good walker, and when we were living among the lakes, he was very fond of climbing the hills round Grasmere and Langdale, often taking his children on long expeditions, starting in the early morning and not returning until the fall of dusk. From Allan Bank he used to take us up the Langdale Pikes, the Crinkle Crags, Bowfell and Helvellyn; and with Raymond and myself he often made the ascent of Scawfell Pike, with its great scarred cliffs, and grey precipitous screes stretching down into Wastdale. On our first ascent of Scawfell we started from Dungeon Ghyll, and my mother, who was in delicate health, rode a roan pony along the hot airless Langdale valley and up the rocky zig-zags of Rosset Ghyll. About an hour later, when we were at a height of over two thousand feet a storm cloud, which had been hanging over Wastdale, rolled up against the crags of Great End, enclosing us in inky darkness through which the lightning flashed and darted with a noise like the explosion of bombs, crackling and blazing on the cliffs above, and on the screes below, which lie between Esk House and the valley.

We came to a halt near the wall of a bleak, roofless shelter for sheep; here for some minutes we seemed to be perched not far from the centre of the thunder-cloud and torrents of icy rain whipped down on the steaming flanks of my mother's pony; my father, still a slender and somewhat ascetic figure, his face gleaming with the rain and illuminated now and then by the fitful flashes of the storm, offered the cup of his flask to the shivering members of his party, and here at the age of nine, soaked to the skin, I had my first but not my least comforting experience of a ration of whisky.

On another day when we were climbing Helvellyn and were looking down on Red Tarn near the foot of the precipice, my father described a tragic incident that happened there early in the century: a lonely climber fell from the rocks of Striding Edge and three months later his remains were found by a shepherd, still guarded by a terrier called 'Foxey,' who had been his only companion.

This incident was cited by many as a classic instance of a dog's fidelity. Scott and Wordsworth climbed Helvellyn together and looked down on the spot soon after the discovery, and each of them wrote a poem on the terrier.[1] Scott's lines are perhaps the better known:

'How long didst thou think that his silence was slumber?
When the wind waved his garment, how oft didst thou start?'

But by certain cynics a sinister doubt was raised and it was villainously suggested that the dog had shewn his fidelity not only by guarding his god, but also by eating him. 'Dog does not eat dog,' but to most of us it seems even more preposterous that dog should eat man:

[1] See Lockhart's *Life of Scott*.

though a starving man will eat a dog, and in the annals of polar explorers this tragic act becomes almost an incident of routine, the suggestion that the reverse is capable of happening is regarded as a serious slander on the dog.

My father told us this story, looking down on the scarfs of mist that hung round the spine of Striding Edge; he was very far from joining the side of the dog's traducers, and the slander has been definitely refuted by the discovery of a letter of the same year which describes the skeleton as being still clad in its clothes.[1] The dog's diet was probably dead sheep, which are often found in the ghylls, and if there were any ground for the other view, it is very improbable that Wordsworth, who was living at the time only a few miles from the spot, should not have heard of it.

When we were living at Grasmere, one of our guests was my mother's father, Dr. Frederick Melland, a tall athletic figure of magnificent build, much beloved by his grandchildren and held in great affection by my father. As he walked over the fells with his loose, easy stride, he carried a grey plaid swinging from his shoulder, his long silvery whiskers fluttered in the wind, and he would often break into song, roaring out a rollicking sea-chanty from the depth of his powerful lungs. Like my father, he was a man of strong constitution and perhaps this was the reason for the humorous but open scepticism which they shared on the value of medical skill.

When I was a child, he would whisk me up on to his shoulder, place me on the palm of his muscular hand and raise me aloft with his arm at full stretch until my

[1] See *English Lakes* by Canon Rawnsley, Vol. 2, p. 70.

head was within a few inches of the ceiling: with my legs dangling down from this dizzy perch I felt that I was supported by a pillar of steel and was rarely conscious of any sense of insecurity. He was devoted to the sea and went on many voyages, sending home to my mother leaves from the olives of Palestine and paper-knives made from their wood. In London as well as on the hills he carried his grey chequered plaid on his shoulder; he possessed the Napoleonic power of taking rapid snatches of sleep at any hour of the day and from these he would rise at short notice, full of life and gaiety, with an appearance of deep refreshment.

Both my parents allowed their children a full measure of liberty; they used the snaffle rather than the curb and their control was very elastic in its nature. At an early age Raymond and myself were allowed to explore the cliffs of Harrison Stickle, Pike O' Stickle, and Pike O' Blisco, the rocks of Dungeon Ghyll, and the chimneys of the Crinkle Crags. Our first lessons in this work were given us by my uncle Charles Melland, whose early tuition probably helped to save us from later disasters. We soon wandered widely over the hills without an escort, but there were precarious moments, when we searched for footholds on the crumbling face of a chimney or stood spread-eagled round the lichened buttress of a ghyll at a point where advance seemed impossible, and retreat extremely difficult.

In the woods above the garden we built a large nest in the boughs of a fir-tree about fifteen feet above the ground. This nest had two stories built of branches and a dense bed of bracken was heaped up on the floor: it was inhabited by myself and my brother Arthur, and Raymond sometimes came to it on Sunday afternoons

in order to smoke a cigarette, whose scent mingled pleasantly with the clean pervasive smell of the bracken. The floor of the lower story was solidly built and would have made an excellent bed, but there were moments of disquiet, when Raymond climbed into the attic and the roof bulged ominously above our heads. The doorway of this house in the boughs with its hanging fringe of bracken was reached by swarming the trunk of the tree, but my father never attempted this feat, and the floor was never subjected to the still severer test of a visit from Haldane, when he came to stay with us.

Though my father was a good walker, I never saw him follow us up one of the chimneys in the rock, and he had no taste and a very doubtful capacity for climbing; but though on the physical plane he was far from being a gymnast, after a long day in the open he rarely shewed any sign of fatigue. His evening game of whist or *vingt-et-un* was often followed by billiards or pyramids. At billiards, as at other games, he played with a light heart and with no approach to a professional standard: the style of his stroke was somewhat deliberate, but he had a very good eye; after taking careful aim he could pot the red at surprisingly long ranges and on wet afternoons at Grasmere I have seen him lay aside a French novel and practise winning hazards and cannons with an appearance of great concentration, while the fine rain of Westmorland misted the window and gusts of mountain air fluttered the clematis against the panes.

As there were no hills in Hampstead high enough to suit his taste, he decided, while he was living there, to take exercise by riding, an adventure in which he

was encouraged by Cyril Flower,[1] then one of the Liberal Whips. My father's horse was a fine, stocky chestnut; when it arrived for the first time, there was a pleasant excitement in the air, and my mother took me down to the stables to see him start on his ride. When the horse was led out onto the cobbles of the stable-yard, its appearance was magnificent: its colour was a deep, glossy gold, and its flanks and quarters were marked with a faint silken dapple like the skin of panther; and when my father mounted into the saddle, smiling slightly at his own predicament, it became evident that his new mount was by no means wanting in mettle: though stocky, it was also frisky, and he had scarcely put his feet in the stirrups, when it lowered its head and began to perform a rapid pirouette on the cobbles, blowing steam from its nostrils, and striking sparks out of the stone, its bucking heels narrowly missing my mother who stood near at hand, smiling in her sun-bonnet, her hair fluttering in the wind of the spring morning.

A subaltern once described his horse as 'dangerous at both ends and damned uncomfortable in the middle,' and this would not be an unfair picture of the steed on which my father was now mounted. Skidding on the cobbles it ambled crab-like out of the stable-yard and danced up the centre of the road, tossing its head now to the right, now to the left, but rarely facing the straight and natural line of its course. He had ridden before, though not often, and though I think my mother had a vague idea that all men were naturally endowed with the gift of horsemanship, her expression was tinged with a certain uneasiness at the explosive energies

[1] Afterwards Lord Battersea.

of this mild-eyed animal, as she gazed rather wistfully after her husband, who disappeared at a rapid clinking trot round the corner of the road, bending forward in his saddle, but sturdily holding his own and shewing no sign of a wavering grip.

He was away for more than two hours,—longer than we had expected: he had been making for the heath when he vanished from view, but I never heard exactly where he went or whether the ride had in fact lasted longer than he intended; and when it was referred to in later years, he usually dismissed the subject with a shrug of his shoulders and a slightly sardonic glint in his eye. He repeated the experience once or twice, but the new purchase was soon sold, and early in the 'nineties he took to other forms of exercise. He was a little apt to conclude that in manners and temperament other horses resembled his own, and in later years I have heard him speak somewhat slightingly of their intelligence, when his nearest connection with them was the ingenious and difficult hobby of naming race-horses.

He enjoyed watching cricket at Lord's and also the Sports at Grasmere, where we went every year from Allan Bank, to see the pole-jumping, and the huge, bulging thews of the Cumberland wrestlers. Here he used to look at the hounds streaking on their trail over the bracken-clad slopes of the hills round the lake, and the amazing race of the guides, distant specks of white, leaping from rock to rock and rushing downward, bounding like midget balls over the precipitous grey screes of Silver Howe.

He was especially fond of watching the pole-jumpers in their miraculous airy suspension over the lath, and

the astonishing descent of the guides, followed by their final sprint across the meadows, fringed by the rushes and the still olive waters of the lake. On Sunday mornings we used to go to the grey square-towered church at Grasmere village, where Wordsworth and Clough lie buried beneath the yews a few yards from the banks of the Rothay ; and in the afternoon my mother would entice her children out of their nest in the fir-tree and take them on her favourite walk to Easedale where the black waters of the tarn foam down through the narrow cleft of Sour Milk Ghyll, and the leaves of the ashes glisten in the smoke of the spray.

2

During the late 'eighties and early 'nineties my father and Haldane used to give a dinner once a year at the ' Blue Posts ', a tavern in a mews off Cork Street : at these dinners there were usually about eight guests, including, as a rule, men of letters, artists, and politicians. George Meredith was often there : my father on one occasion heard him extemporising at the top of his voice a dozen lines of blank verse in explanation of Haldane's philosophy, and in other ways than this he seems to have more than held his own in the most exacting company : others present at various times were Arthur Balfour, Morley, Carson, Edward Grey, Lord Justice Bowen, Lord Rosebery, Chamberlain, Lord Randolph Churchill, Burne-Jones, Russell Lowell, and Alfred Lyall. My father told us that at one of these dinners Chamberlain joined in an argument which was being carried on between Lord Rosebery and Lord Randolph Churchill, and it was on this occasion that Lord Randolph, in order to ' keep the ring ', told a

waiter to put a flower-pot on the table between Chamberlain and himself. At Allan Bank, however, there was no clash of Titans, and except for Haldane, none of these great figures were to be seen climbing the zig-zag path to Easedale or walking in the mists that hang above Great End and Pike O' Blisco.

Allan Bank was an island of peace, rest and freedom, remote from the frousty conflicts of the courts, the turmoil of politics, and the flashing, momentary contacts of London dinners. Here my father, contrary to his later custom, took many of his meals out of doors near a spring on the fell, or sitting with his wife on the still shore of a tarn, while her pony stood beside them munching the crisp grass of the hills. In these days my father usually carried a map in his pocket and in my earliest recollection he already had an accurate knowledge of the shapes of the hills and their puzzling changes of contour when they were seen from new angles. Once, when we stood on the top of Scawfell Pike in clear weather, he gave us an examination in the names of peaks and fells of which a great number were to be seen on every side, and this exercise was sometimes repeated when we were lunching out in the bracken above the house.

This habit of playful examination was extended to the novels of Scott and Dickens, and the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and other English poets, and in later years to the names of Napoleon's marshals and the mistresses of Louis the Fourteenth; he already took an interest in literary conundrums, especially in a search for the authors of famous quotations and well-known phrases, a taste which lasted into old age, and like his fondness for chess and cards, acted



HELEN ASQUITH

as a happy, momentary release from the stresses of political duty. At these upland meals in the open air his spirits were high and he already shewed signs of that mellow equanimity and calm impartial temper, which developed with the passing of the years and was felt in the later period of his life beyond the circle of his family.

My mother shared his fondness for literature; though here, as elsewhere, she would often follow where he pointed the way, she had rare independent qualities of her own and her individuality was far from being merged in his. She was very fond of poetry, and Wordsworth and Coleridge were among her favourite authors. It was on her suggestion that my father took us to the hills of Westmorland during these early summers; she liked to escape from the fringes of London to the wilder parts of the country and would have preferred tracks that had not been trodden before: she was fond of collecting wild flowers, and a bunch of grass of Parnassus with its delicate, finely veined petals, one of the plants that grow on the banks of the ghylls, was often to be found in a small glass on her writing-table.

She gave the impression of having found a quiet happiness of her own, and she had the secret of understanding, a rare gift of imaginative sympathy with those whom she met: this quality in her encouraged talk in others, and her own conversation, though never intrusive, was humorous and pointful, especially perhaps when she was pricking a bubble of pretension. Entirely unselfish in her nature, she had little desire for the obvious prizes of the world, little care about her own position, no taste whatever for personal fame; her

ambition was not for herself; her main desire was that her husband should fulfil his powers, and that his life should have a background of amusement and happiness remote from the dust of its conflict.

3

The period from 1887 to 1892 was one of growing and momentous change in my father's life, a time of transition from preparation to execution, from struggle to success, which was interwoven and shadowed in the end by the irony of a deep personal tragedy.

In the House of Commons he made his mark by his maiden speech in 1887. According to Mr. Roskill, who was now a pupil in his chambers, he was first brought into public notice as an advocate by his defence of Cunninghame Graham who with Mr. John Burns was tried at the Old Bailey in connection with certain disturbances in Trafalgar Square. In this case both defendants were charged with 'unlawful assembly': the ground of the charge was that in defiance of an order made by the Commissioner of Police, they had attempted to hold a public meeting in the Square. In spite of my father's efforts in this case, assisted by John Burns himself, who according to my father conducted his own defence with 'vigour and adroitness,' both defendants were clapped into prison for a period of six weeks. But this was not the end: five years later, when the junior Counsel for the defence had become Home Secretary, the case had a sequel, and Asquith ordered that for the future on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and Bank Holidays meetings should be allowed in Trafalgar Square provided that they dispersed before nightfall. This doctrine of a free Trafalgar Square was

continued in later years and worked, on the whole, with a singular want of friction.

A year after this case my father's position at the Bar, which for him was a means rather than an end, was greatly improved by his cross-examination of the Manager of *The Times* before the Parnell Commission. His success was accompanied by an increasing flow of invitations; in this way and in his other activities he came to know such strangely various personalities as Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, Augustine Birrell, who later occupied a neighbouring constituency in the Kingdom of Fife, Cory, the author of *Ionica*, a neighbour at Hampstead, and Parnell himself, who was then the icy, mysterious centre of a storm whose reverberations were to be heard far beyond the shores of the United Kingdom.

My father was always deeply interested in the problem of Parnell's character and career, which he regarded as one of the riddles of history, and during these years he had many opportunities for studying the Irish Leader at close range: when the Commission was sitting, he saw him three or four times a week and he was present at a small dinner given by Mr. Armitstead, which was probably the first occasion on which Mr. Gladstone and Parnell had met in private life. Though Parnell was utterly contemptuous of democracy, he was followed wherever he went by the fiery devotion of a people. He was openly indifferent to the convenience of his colleagues and my father thought that he took a 'grim and freakish pleasure' in straining their allegiance. As a private hobby he did experiments in a laboratory, but he had, apparently, no knowledge of literature, and little power of expression. Though my father spent many hours

alone with him every week during the sittings of the Commission, and their talk often travelled beyond the technical details of the case, he relates that he never heard Parnell say 'a good thing'. Parnell seems to have possessed a curious obtuseness, lit here and there by penetrating flashes of insight, a strange and fascinating compound. As an instance of the first of these qualities my father has related the following incident:

"Late on a Friday afternoon, when everyone's powers of endurance (including Parnell's) were all but exhausted, Sir Richard (Webster) cited a passage from some speech of his in Parliament which Parnell found it difficult at the moment to justify or even to explain. 'Do you mean, Mr. Parnell,' asked counsel in his most solemn tones, 'that you intended to deceive the House of Commons?' Parnell replied with weary *insouciance*, 'I suppose I did.'

"As we walked away from the Court to our usual consultation, Parnell remarked to me with unruffled complacency: 'Didn't you think Webster's bowling very wide to-day?' 'The bowling was wide enough,' I growled, 'if you hadn't hit your wicket.'"[1]

By a curious irony of democracy the prospects of Ireland were clouded, again brightened, and were finally veiled in storm as a result of private incidents in the life of her leader: when the Pigott forgeries were exposed, shafts of sun came through the clouds, but this brightness was soon to be obscured: one of the blackest days in Irish history was the day in November 1890 when Captain O'Shea won his divorce suit and costs were awarded against Parnell, though to the impartial eye the issue of a divorce case seems to have

[1] *Fifty Years of Parliament*, I, 187.

little bearing on the arguments for Irish autonomy. A week or so before the end my father relates that he met Parnell in the Temple on his way to see his counsel:

"He was more alert and debonair than was his wont, and I said to him: 'Well—is it going to be all right?' He smiled almost genially and replied, 'Of course it is! You needn't worry about that.'"

But it was not all right: as a result of that decree the Irish Party was split into two fragments and this passion of the 'eighties formed a link in the strange, tragic chain of causes that led thirty years later to arson, murder, and civil war in Ireland. A few days after Parnell's death in 1891 there is an entry in my father's diary giving his own estimate of Parnell at that time and the views also of Mr. Gladstone and of John Morley:

"We talked of his character. Mr. G. is all for forgetting the last ten months and ranks him with Grattan and O'Connell. M. (Morley) thinks this estimate too high: something *mesquin* in his character. I, on the other hand, contended that, looking on him as a force in the world it was too low: that judging by results clearly traceable to one man's initiative, by the dead-heave given, he was one of the three or four men of the century."

The companionship of Augustine Birrell must have been an acute and in many ways an agreeable contrast to the cold mysterious influence of Parnell. Birrell had spent the early days of his career in drawing up the Trust Deeds of Nonconformist chapels and enclosing in a legal frame the leading principles of Calvinism: but though this would not appear to be a fertile soil for the growth of such a nature as his, it had not in any way dammed the fresh springs of his humour or the

urbanity with which he delighted his friends. He combined humour with wit in a rare degree, and the flashes of his talk were reinforced by the charm of his face, the glint of his eye, the wide, downward curve of his mouth, the expressive presence of a mellow, twinkling personality.

On one occasion my father, Haldane, who was M.P. for Haddington, and Birrell, who represented West Fife, climbed to the summit of a small hill near the Firth of Forth: "What a grateful thought," said Birrell, as he looked at the wide, sweeping view, "that there is not an acre in this vast and varied landscape which is not represented at Westminster by a London barrister!"

Birrell's majority in this Scottish Kingdom was always greater than that of my father, and he used to tell against himself a remark made to him by one of his strongest supporters: 'I canna reckon how it is, Mr. Birrell, that ye always hold your seat so easily, while *a really clever man*, like Mr. Asquith, only gets in with the greatest difficulty.'

Birrell was once a member of a cricket team composed of authors, the captain of which was Sir James Barrie. In one of the matches, near the beginning of his innings, Birrell broke a bat which he had borrowed from Barrie; beaming at his own prowess, he brandished it triumphantly above his head and gave a victorious shout to the pavilion: 'Bring me some more bats!'

Chapter IV

THE JOURNEY TO SCOTLAND

I

My sister Violet was born in the year of her father's maiden speech, and owing partly perhaps to this slight expansion in the family, my parents rather reluctantly decided to leave their house in John Street, and towards the end of the 'eighties went to live in Maresfield Gardens, another road in Hampstead.

A long brown furniture van drew up near the garden gate beneath the boughs of the catalpa tree: packing-cases containing my father's library stood piled on the floor of his small study surrounded by the vacancy of gaping shelves; chairs and tables looked strangely unfamiliar as they were carried across the garden and disappeared one by one through the gate; the rocking-horse, one of our earliest memories, was borne out across the cricket-lawn swaying uneasily between two men in green baize aprons, with the grey wisps of its scanty mane flustered by the wind, and lifted tail first in a position of great indignity into the open maw of the van.

The first momentary excitements of exploring the new house were soon tempered by regret at leaving the old one: the new house had a garden, but it was

not so large or so wild as the orchard of John Street; like the house, it was new, and contained no pears or apples, and no timber of any merit; the turf of the lawn was unseasoned by the years; there was no mulberry tree, young or old, and the seductive scent of mulberry jam no longer floated up the stairs from the kitchen. The brick wall near the gateway had broken out into a queer, spasmodic, salty rash, with a strangely mottled surface; its cause was a source of speculation among the children, but, whatever it was, the cure was never found, and to the impartial eye the effect was deplorable. Though in charm the new house could not be compared with the old, it was certainly larger, and it contained more rooms: there was more space for my father's books and his oaken writing-table with its rows of pipes, but the windows of his study no longer looked out into the boughs of a pear-tree; outside was the drab, muddy surface of a macadam road, newly churned and pressed by steam-rollers, with long lines of fledgling trees sprouting from holes in the pavement, their crests bending to the breeze.

Shortly after our arrival at Maresfield Gardens there were two disappointments: the first was the death of the family tortoise, the news of which was received by my father with an expression of sympathy, but it was an animal which he had always viewed, when it came his way, with marked detachment, and he did not seem seriously disturbed by its loss. The second disappointment was the sale of my father's horse: for some time, as a boy of nine, I had nursed a secret ambition to ride this animal, with its stubby chestnut tail and its dappled silken skin; but before I made the suggestion, my father announced at lunch with a satisfaction that he made no

effort to hide, that he had sold the horse, and he seemed delighted with the idea that he, at any rate, would never mount it again.

At this time there was a curious domestic episode, which amused my father when he heard of it: one evening after tea my mother read aloud to us a story about the Slave Trade; I think it was designed to repel the reader from the idea of servitude, but on me it seems to have had the reverse effect and for the moment I was made a convert in its favour. At that time I thought slavery was rather a good idea, and a few days later, finding a young friend—then only seven years old—short of money and desirous of chocolate, I promptly bought him for the sum of sixpence. Under the terms of purchase he was to be my slave for ever, and he discharged several tasks under my orders; but after a few days of servitude he discovered that under the British flag our agreement was void, and cast off my yoke by breaking suddenly into a spirited and successful rebellion.

At Maresfield Gardens my mother's small dinner-parties increased in number and among her guests were Augustine Birrell, Haldane, John Morley, Mr. John Roskill, who was working with my father, and Cyril Flower. Raymond and myself were too young to go down to these dinners, and our knowledge of them was confined to the sounds of talk and laughter that poured intermittently out of the dining-room door, when it was opened to admit a new course. These sounds floated gaily up the stairs to our bedroom in the higher regions of the house, but here, too, things were happening: Raymond, who was now eleven years old, told stories of his own invention and the sequence of his narrative was, as a rule, in no way disturbed by

the gaieties that floated up from the young Victorian lions below.

Raymond's stories were part of a *Saga* of adventures, to which his brothers also contributed; its title was 'The Scollion's Deep', an abysmal mysterious land situated near the bottom of a vast imaginary cleft in the globe, somewhere between earth and Hades: this place of mists and twilight was inhabited by pygmies, giants, bishops, and prehistoric animals of many varieties. For some reason which I was never able to guess, bishops always made a strange and almost exuberant appeal to my brother's fancy, and in the many episodes of the Scollion's Deep one of their order often played a leading part in the crisis of the action. This twilight land, which was too deeply buried to catch the rays of the sun, was now and then illumined by the flare of a bursting volcano or swept by the raving crest of a tidal wave: amongst its varied inhabitants it contained men with wings, and though its atmosphere was never tinged with politics, one of these bat-like men who swept on enormous pinions above its clouded abysses bore a singular resemblance to the titanic form of Mr. Gladstone.

But many of the creatures in this country—and especially, perhaps, a Kelpie which lived in the black recesses of a cave covered with stalactites—were of a kind which I have not seen in this life and which I have no desire to meet in the next. These stories were only told in darkness, when the lights had been put out in our bedroom, and they sometimes continued long after the clopping hoofs and jingling bells of the hansoms that carried away the guests below, had faded into the night. When at last the time came to sleep, the phantasms of this misty abysmal land still haunted

the shadows; the statesman with eagle profile hovered on his bat-like wings above the bone armour of a vast rhinoceros; the Kelpie was there too, of which nothing was ever seen except its burning eyes, and the bishop also, who was often inclined towards nudism, though he never dispensed with his top-hat.

Raymond's roving fancies, which gave force and point to his remarkable gift for metaphor, though somewhat quelled, were never schooled out of being by the discipline of scholarship, at which in later years he shewed his brilliance: they never became encrusted with pedantry, and remained fresh and original, unhampered by the arid logic of the law which he afterwards made his profession.

He was very fond of playing at soldiers: he mustered an army which contained several coloured battalions and, when it was deployed, it covered a large proportion of the floor of our sitting-room with its commander, 'General Burnaby', riding at its head. The General had been in many battles and had been hit by so many cannon-balls that only a few streaks of scarlet remained on his tunic, but he was still an enlivening figure, as he waved the hilt of his broken sword and led his men to the attack, mounted on a three-legged charger, which had lost a hoof and a fetlock. We bought two guns for the army which we charged with gunpowder and loaded with leaden pellets, but most of the artillery was of the pea-shooter type, without smoke or noise, but more effective than the others in practice. When at last in addition to his other wounds the General lost his head—(not in the metaphorical sense, for in that sense we always imagined him as keeping it)—the time had come at last for his military funeral and at this ceremony

our little bronze guns fired a salvo, and the blue smoke of their powder floated up to the ceiling in a last salute.

When Raymond received a tip from my father before going back to school, it was his custom to spend a large proportion of it the same afternoon: this he did in the most open-handed way, taking me and my brother Arthur for a walk round the most notable shops in the district and plying us at little marble-topped tables with heavy but delicious doses of candied pine-apple, strawberry ice, tangerine jellies, and strange tropical fruits, which appealed more to our curiosity than to our sense of taste. We sometimes suffered from the diet of these farewell banquets, which was rather violently mingled; but Raymond seemed to consider that the sacrifice—which for him was double—was well worth making, and returned to his school with a slightly impaired digestion and with only a fraction of his tip remaining in his pocket.

2

In the summer of 1891 my mother told us of the suggestion that we should spend August and September at Lamlash in the island of Arran, and the plan was very well received by her children, as we liked the idea of going to an island, and of reaching the end of our journey in a boat instead of a train. We were all devoted to Westmorland: Arran was regarded as an isolated experiment, a momentary change, and next year we intended to return to Grasmere. To my father, when he set out for Scotland, the omens may well have seemed good: Mr. Roskill has described a conversation with him in 1890 which gives an idea of his outlook at that time:

"He told me, one evening at his house . . . that he could not accept a judgeship, but wished to be Home Secretary. I asked him what he would do if, after attaining that position he had to resign it owing to the defeat of the Government. He replied that he would return to the Bar. But had that ever been done before, I inquired, and had a Privy Councillor ever practised before Judges? He thought not, but added that he would do it, and I could see that he felt sure of himself."[1]

In 1890 he had again put matters to the touch, and became a Q.C.—a daring move for one who had only lately developed a practice as a junior barrister. As a Q.C. he had added to his reputation by his success in the case of the Berkeley Peerage. In the last few years there had been a rapid transformation: instead of being an unknown, briefless barrister with few friends in London and little influence, eking out a living with the help of his pen, he was known now not only to the judges, but to the House of Commons and his political leaders, in the sphere of his real ambition. After a long, dusty struggle the gates of success had opened and when he started on his journey to Arran in August 1891, he was in the highest spirits, regarding everything with the mellow, unflurried outlook of his holiday mood: some of his ambitions seemed already by a turn of fortune to have come within range, the prospect was fair, and there seemed to be scarcely a cloud in the sky; he had discarded his black coat and with it the weight of professional cares, which he seemed to keep in a compartment of their own, the door of which he could lock and bolt and open again, when the time came to deal with them, a process which was sometimes confused

[1] *Life of Lord Oxford*, I, 59.

with lethargy by those who did not know the keener edges of his nature.

The house which he had taken near Lamlash, within a short distance of the shore, looked out towards the slopes of Holy Island, which lies in the mouth of the bay, and to northward lay Goatfell and the higher hills of Arran. It was built of red sandstone and had a garden of a trim Scottish type; it was much smaller than that of Allan Bank, and here there were no birch-woods climbing up over the foothills, but the view was magnificent, especially at night when warships entered the bay and splayed out the rays of their searchlights, ranging from cloud to cloud and lighting up the crests of the hills. When we arrived there, after the voyage from Ardrossan, it was clear that my father, not less than his children, was looking forward to this first summer in Scotland with an almost boyish enjoyment.

Soon after our arrival we rowed across to Holy Island, while he sat smoking his pipe in the stern with my mother beside him, and when we reached the shore, they both climbed with us to the crest to see the wide sweeping view of the hills on the western coast. A few days later things began to go wrong, and the rest of the story can be shortly told. When we had been in Arran for little more than a week, which was spent in fishing, bathing and walking on the hills, I went to bed with a temperature caused by some trivial complaint. My mother came to nurse me, but on the second night she was suddenly taken ill and had repeated attacks of faintness; I sat up with her during most of the night, and wanted to rouse my father, but she would not let me disturb him, insisting that her illness would soon pass away and that it was a

matter of little consequence, though I felt at the time it was otherwise. In fact it was the onset of typhoid. Next day she was carried upstairs to her room; during the time of suspense that followed she was too ill to see her children, but she sent down short notes to them every day, and for some time it was hoped that the fever was taking its normal course. One rainy afternoon in September we went into Brodick and returned with a number of small presents for my father's birthday which was the 12th of the month; but this year his birthday was never celebrated: on the 10th of September his wife's illness reached its crisis and she died in the early hours of the next morning.

Among the curt entries in his diary that day is marked by a single dash, and this blank wordless line records the deepest tragedy of his life: by the irony of chance, when the sky seemed fair and open, he had lost one who through all those arduous years had stood at his side, brave, patient, an ever-present source of sympathetic understanding and a quality of imaginative wisdom more rare than many of the harder facets of cleverness. These qualities, which lay behind her impulses, and her complete want of egotism won the deepest devotion from those who knew her. Haldane in his autobiography speaks of the simplicity and beauty of her nature, and my father has described her in a letter to his friend Lady Horner written in 1892:

"Hers was one of those personalities which it is almost impossible to depict. The strong colours of the palette seem to be too heavy and garish; it is difficult to paint a figure in the soft grey tints which would best fit her, and yet she was not neutral or negative. Her mind was clear and strong, but it was not cut in facets

. . . What gave her her rare quality was her character, which everyone who knew her intimately (Haldane for instance) agrees was the most selfless and unworldly that they have ever encountered. She was warm, impulsive, naturally quick-tempered, and generous almost to a fault, but in all the years of our married life I never knew an occasion when to do the right thing seemed to cost her an effort."

The hills of Westmorland seemed a natural setting for one who so deeply loved the wild and open country, and for a nature which combined strength and delicacy with a certain remoteness from the prizes of the world: those who knew her, may well envision her wandering over the hills on the way to Easedale, riding her pony through the peat-water at the ford of a stream, or bending down to pick the grass of Parnassus on the banks of a foaming ghyll.

For my father the years of his youthful happiness had passed, but, in some sphere of reality, it is easy to imagine that they were never lost, a background rarely referred to, but often emerging fresh and clear through the press of closer events, and always somewhere alive.

Chapter V

FACT AND FANCY

I

My father came back from Arran a widower with five children: Raymond, the eldest of the family, was twelve, and Cyril, the youngest, was little more than a year old. After his return my father buried himself in politics and the law; he was away at his work for most of the day, and looked in to see us for a short time in the evening, pacing up and down the room from door to window, while he talked to us. A Swiss lady was engaged to look after us, and Raymond went back to his private school near Ascot, while Arthur, myself, and the two small children remained at home.

A few months after our return from Scotland I was sent to the same private school as Raymond, who was then in his last year. During my first term I was made to fight another small boy: I had no grievance against him, nor he against me, and we had never met before until we faced one another on the edge of the gravelled playground to make sport for the others, like a pair of cocks, transported from different parts of the country, who see one another for the first time in the cockpit. Urged on by the crowd we both took the offensive at

once, and as we were not wearing gloves and neither of us had any idea of defence, our lips and noses were streaming with blood in the course of the first few minutes. We were both fairly strong for our ages and in our prolonged double offensive each of us must have scored a good many points, but after three or four rounds the result was declared a draw, and another pair of pugilists, who had only recently left the nursery, were set up to take our places. It is difficult to judge how far this rough method of initiation which made a holiday for others, led to the development of a Spartan fibre in ourselves, but though many of us emerged from it with black eyes, broken noses, and other physical changes of a pronounced type, if a balance were struck, it would probably be found that it did us more good than harm.

During my first summer term a strange incident happened and as a result I came into contact with a very eccentric character, a tall fair boy (whom I will call 'Jones'). Jones was not as a rule a cheerful companion and he was a boy of lonely disposition, but he did not look unhappy. One afternoon, when we were walking back from the cricket-field, he broke off some sprays of nightshade from a plant that was growing in the hedge-row, and holding in his hand this sinister bouquet with its venomous purple flowers, he suddenly confided in me that he intended to kill himself. As a rule he was a very silent boy, and this startling confidence was one of his rare fragments of conversation. I did not know him at all well, and at first I thought he was making a joke, but when he fingered the sharp evil-looking blooms with an uncanny glint in his eye, thrust a spray of them into his mouth and began to

munch it up, I snatched away the rest of the bouquet and threw it into the ditch.

Jones was apparently immune from this particular dose of poison—and perhaps it was not sufficiently strong to cause him discomfort; but I remained doubtful at the time whether he had actually swallowed the flowers or stowed them away in the pouch of his cheek. This was very far from being the end of the matter: a few days later, when we had been playing cricket, he again overtook me on my way up from the field, and this time his confidences, though not so curt, were in some ways even more surprising. He told me that in the woods near the school there lived a wild gang of criminals, and that I—without knowing it—had somehow offended them; he added that they intended to poison me and that I should never on any account drink my water at lunch. Though I was to be the main victim, Jones said that they now suspected him of trying to protect me, and intended to take their revenge on him as well. He told me that more than once he had been actually captured by the gang and even tortured by them; in the story, as he unwound it, I was the cause of the trouble, and he, my innocent protector, after playing for some time an arduous and heroic part, had been so much persecuted that he had been driven to attempt suicide by eating the bunch of nightshade.

He described their Chief, etching him with vivid outlines, and as Jones depicted him, he seemed to be no lay model, but a solid, living figure: according to Jones he was a tall, rakish creature, very quick and lithe in his movements; the description of his 'litheness' made an impression on me and I imagined him as a sort of panther-man. He was also very fierce and sudden in his actions;

Jones told me that on one occasion when he was a captive of the gang, the leader had lost his temper with one of his followers, seized him by the scruff of the neck and had broken his back by bending him across his knee. He told his story with swift touches of colour and much unconscious art, and it seemed clear, that whether there was any truth in it or not, there were many moments when he convinced himself that every detail of it had really happened.

One Sunday when he was sitting next me in church at the evening service, he nudged my elbow and pointed to a tall muscular figure in a raincoat who was standing alone in a pew some way in front of us: "That's the Chief," he whispered in an awed voice; "he's come here to have a look at us." The Chief's face was turned away towards the pulpit, but I noticed that he held a hymn-book rather negligently in one of the hands that had done such foul work only a few weeks before; for the moment I forgot my scepticism: the idea that this sinister figure had come out of his retreat in the woods to spy on his victims while they were singing the evening hymn, filled me with awe and fascination. As I watched him retreating in the shadow of the hedge, he certainly seemed rather 'lithe' in his movements; he was also powerful and well-made, and I did not find it difficult to believe that he could break a man's back across his knee, an idea which seemed all the more vivid by its contrast with the peace of the evening bells.

When we were walking back from church, I explained to Jones that I had never seen the Chief before, and I asked what was his grievance. Jones answered that he too was in the dark on this point, but he had no doubt that a grievance existed. I suggested that we should

visit the leader together and ask him to explain the cause of the trouble, but Jones shook his head with a bitter smile: 'That would be the end of both of us,' he said, 'me as well as you. No: we can't do that. He'd finish you off quicker, perhaps—that would be the only difference.'

Looking back on those curious days, I think that he believed what he said: his manner was far from being that of an actor, and when he was talking, there were certainly moments when a spark of belief was lit in me as well; I examined my glass at lunch but never detected a grain of poison—green, white, or blue: it was of course possible that the leader or one of his emissaries would poison the water instead of the glass, but I felt that even a gangster of the most callous type would feel some kind of scruple against poisoning a whole school in order to reach a single victim; apart altogether from those streaks of sentiment, often of rather a mawkish kind, which fiction sometimes invites us to find in a scoundrel, the villain described by Jones was not wanting in art, and it seemed improbable that instead of neatly picking his bird he would stoop to the clumsy expedient of 'browning' the whole covey.

At intervals Jones would confide in me that he had climbed out of a passage window at night and had another painful interview with the Chief in his secret haunt in the woods: but as time passed, and I failed to develop any symptoms of poisoning, my wavering spark of faith began to flicker and fade, and came very near to being quenched altogether. In this unsatisfactory state of affairs he seemed to feel that I was in need of a sign, and it was not long before he provided

one: on a winter morning, some months after his first confidence, he wandered across from the other side of the long dormitory with a strange glint in his eye, to which I was gradually becoming accustomed, and which usually foretold that he was about to give me some sinister news about the plots of the gang: "He knifed me last night," he whispered, looking over his shoulder to see that no one was listening. "It wasn't the first time either."

"But how did he do it?"

"He ordered the others to hold me down—but I'd sooner not describe it." He unbuttoned his shirt and cautiously exposed an ugly cut about an inch long between two of his ribs.

To my suggestion that he should report this atrocious incident to the headmaster he grimly shook his head: "That would be the end of everything," he said. "I shall treat it myself—I'm used to that kind of thing by this time."

"What about the matron?" I asked. "Surely you ought to get it dressed?"

"I'm used to doing that," he said grimly, buttoning up his shirt with an air of Promethean gloom. "This isn't the first time he's done it: it wont be the last either." He seemed to be looking forward fatalistically to a future of indefinite suffering, but though he acted his part with conviction, I was not much impressed by the sign which he had provided to sustain my wavering faith: it was certainly an ugly cut, but it seemed a brand scarcely worthy of the leader, whom Jones had so often described to me, and I felt that if he had really meant business, he would have left on his victim a more serious mark of his displeasure.

In my second year Jones went away to a public school: I had letters from him now and then, and in some of these he mentioned the leader of the gang; the letters came at longer and longer intervals, and finally ceased altogether, and with them Jones passed out of my life. I never heard what happened to him later, but I sometimes wonder whether he escaped from the strange dizzy world of his fancies, when the world of fact about him began to assume a pattern no less wild and garish than that of his youthful dreams.

2

I have never met anyone who looked back with enthusiasm to his life at a private school and in this I am no exception. Our headmaster, however, who was at once an athlete and the author of a Greek grammar, was extremely popular: in the class-room and out of it he used to wear a tweed coat which had a peculiarly strong peaty scent and this pleasant, rather comforting smell of homespun surrounds my early memories of the classics. Almost equally popular was his magnificent loose-limbed St. Bernard puppy which used to gambol round the touch-line, while his master was umpiring at Rugby football.

The food, as was often the case in the private schools of those days, was not marked by variety; the cook seemed to find no inspiration in catering for boys, and nothing stirred her from the grim regularity of school routine. I suggested to Raymond, who had won a scholarship at Winchester, that he should send me some supplies, and he promptly replied by sending me a slice of ham in his next letter, which arrived at breakfast-time, slightly stained with the ink on the note-paper,

but none the less acceptable to the weary palate. These gifts continued for some weeks: they added a simple variety to the diet and there was a touch of novelty in emptying an envelope onto my plate and sharing with my neighbours this strange section of our correspondence.

When I was still at a private school, my father took a house in Surrey near Box Hill, and here we usually spent some part of our holidays. He also took a flat in Mount Street, which was administered by a valet of such remarkable qualities that he might almost have served as a model for Jeeves, though his operations were not so far-reaching as those of Mr. Wodehouse's creation. During these early years of the 'nineties my father was very heavily occupied by politics and his growing practice at the Bar; his main base was his flat in London, but he usually joined us at the house in Surrey at the end of the week, and now and then he spent his nights in the country, returning to London in the morning.

George Meredith lived at Box Hill, only a few miles away from us, and on Sundays my father and Haldane often went to call on him. After one of these visits my father gave us an account of Meredith's extraordinary gift for the weaving of impromptu verse: he told us that while they were talking together, a lady had entered the room and somewhat to her embarrassment Meredith had greeted her by striding up and down, and declaiming at the top of his voice an admirable sonnet composed on the spur of the moment about the dress she was wearing. My father was much attracted by Meredith and was delighted by the arresting flashes in his talk, which he described as 'sprinkled with gems': he was a great admirer of Meredith's

poetry, but on the question of his prose he seemed to agree with the candid Victorian who suddenly remarked to the novelist, "By God, George, why don't you write as you talk?"

On summer evenings large numbers of bats used to swerve in over the trees that surrounded our house and one of the sports of the place was to lie in wait and shoot at them with a bow and arrow as they came over the topmost branches, curving and flickering against a dusky sky. Bat-shooting with an arrow is one of the humaner sports, and probably no more easy than shooting a snipe with a rifle in a bad light; now and then in a moment of optimism one of us would claim to have made a hit, but fancy moves swiftly in the dusk, and a bat that dives to rise again may easily be imagined to fall; large numbers of arrows were shot, some of them dangling in the upper foliage and others vanishing for good in the shadows of the undergrowth, but the bats, with some reason, shewed no consciousness of danger: they swerved round again and again, repeating their flickering circles, and seemed on the whole very well contented with such a harmless source of enjoyment. My father now and then looked on at this archery in a mood of indulgent detachment, but he did not take part in it himself, and we never succeeded in persuading him to try his hand at drawing a bow.

3

Mr. Gladstone, who was now in his eighty-third year, had been hopeful about the result of the General Election of July 1892, but his optimism was not well founded, and the Liberals were returned by a meagre majority of forty, which included the Irish vote. My father was

returned by a slightly reduced majority and described his election in a letter to Lady Horner:

'I had a hardish fight at the end, the Kirk, who is a vigorous old lady scratching and kicking at me like a muscular virago. I was more pleased with my boy's (Raymond's) election than my own: on the day that I was returned he got a scholarship at Winchester.' Later he went to Glasgow where he heard Miss Margot Tennant deliver a 'highly successful maiden speech.' 'There are certainly times in life,' he writes in the same letter, '—a general election being one—when your friend's theory that the judgment day is over and that this is hell seems plausible. Between you and me (tho' as a hardened optimist I scarcely admit it to myself) I am not in high spirits about the future—the country's, the party's, my own. To save others even if one cannot save oneself, is something; but to fail in both would be a poor result.'

Lord Salisbury did not resign, and when Parliament met again, my father was chosen by Mr. Gladstone to move that the Government should, but did not, possess the confidence of the House. 'On ordinary occasions,' he observed, 'the speech from the throne provides the mover and seconder with a variety of topics, and the address itself is in the nature of a grace before meat, in which the House expresses in anticipation its gratitude for the legislative bounty of H.M.'s Government. On the present occasion the cupboard is bare, and to these Honourable Gentlemen has been entrusted the task of formulating the thanks of the House for a completely empty table.'

The motion was carried and the Government resigned. In the cabinet formed by Mr. Gladstone my father was

appointed Home Secretary, but to his deep regret his friend Haldane was not offered a post in it. Six years before Asquith had been an unknown struggling barrister, and now at the early age of forty he was one of the Secretaries of State, but he had found success at the moment of his party's failure and difficulties faced the Government from every side. Mr. Gladstone's massive intellect was still active and alert, and history may well credit him with imaginative insight into the clouded future of Ireland, a spark of true prophetic fire: but a small composite majority of forty was a feeble weapon for winning such a fight as the battle for Home Rule or for storming the hostile rampart of the House of Lords, which always loomed in front of him, commanding the whole political position.

In the conduct of the Second Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons, though his senses of sight and hearing were dimmed, his energy was amazing, his courage unfailing, and his learning sometimes even too copious for the taste of his followers. The result of so much industry, ardour and courage, was the automatic rejection of the Bill by a vast majority in the House of Lords. Mr. Gladstone presented Miss Margot Tennant with a gardenia which he wore in his button-hole, when he introduced this ill-fated measure, and in later years she shewed me its brown, faded petals pressed between the pages of an album, a strange and rather pathetic relic of the last hopeless fight of that fiery dauntless old Titan against impossible odds.

In addition to the Home Rule Bill other Government measures were either rejected outright or amended beyond recognition by the hostile majority in the Upper Chamber. It was an 'uneasy' cabinet: it was

threatened not only by dangers from without but by inner dissensions, and when Mr. Gladstone resigned in March 1894, Lord Rosebery, the new Prime Minister, was scarcely on speaking terms with Sir William Harcourt, his own chief lieutenant, and Leader of the House of Commons.

It is easy to imagine that the meetings of such a cabinet as this, containing though it did so large a proportion of political ability, were subject at times to icy and disturbing gusts; the elements of discord were at its heart. My father made a speech on the second reading of the Home Rule Bill, which was highly spoken of by the critics, and during these few years he was heavily occupied with the business of his own department. He received a number of deputations from shopkeepers, busmen and others on the subject of the right of public meeting in Trafalgar Square, and on reaching a solution which satisfied a variety of contending interests, he was congratulated by Lord Rosebery on having pleased at once *The Times* and the *Star*, an achievement which he compared with that 'of Hannibal in crossing the Alps or of Orpheus charming his miscellaneous congregation.' The Parnellites led by John Redmond argued that the sentences of fourteen Irish dynamiters ought to be commuted on the ground apparently that the dynamite was only intended for political purposes, but Asquith sturdily rejected their plea.

Even more serious was a strike in 1893 of a quarter of a million coal miners in the North of England. At Featherstone in the West Riding of Yorkshire there was organized violence, burning of houses and demolition of property: the complete destruction of the colliery

was threatened by a mob armed with bludgeons; the Riot Act was read and the magistrate made seven appeals to the crowd. When these were unavailing, he gave orders to the commmander of a small detachment of thirty soldiers to fire on the strikers, with the result that two men on the fringe of the crowd were killed.

Not only at the time but long afterwards my father was blamed at Labour meetings for the deadly flight of these two bullets, which were fired at the command of the local magistrate; in the election of 1910, after an interval of seventeen years, I heard him interrupted more than once by cries of 'Featherstone!' and 'Murderer!', but on each occasion he continued his speech with detached equanimity, without shewing any sign of disturbance or the least flicker of conscious guilt.[1] In 1893 he piloted through the House an Employer's Liability Bill and in 1894 and 1895 he prepared a new Factory Bill which marked a decisive advance in the protection of workers: it contained provisions to prevent overcrowding, to restrict overtime and to guard against accidents from moving machinery, and for the first time it required the factories to be so constructed as to give the worker a means of escape in case of fire.

During these busy years my father found time to write regularly to his sons while they were at school: I usually had a letter from him once a week and as a rule it was very concise, dashed off with a quill pen in his characteristic flowing hand; allusions to his own political duties were rare, and when they were made, they were

[1] A very typical incident has been described in the *Life of Lord Oxford*, I, p. 210: 'When a voice at a meeting cried: "That was when you murdered the miners at Featherstone in 1892," his only retort was to correct the date.'

usually of a humorous quality. He must have done a prodigious amount of work in these days, and he combined his load of responsibility with a growing social activity and the demands of a widening circle of friends. In spite of the calls on his time, he rarely shewed any sign of being rattled or worried, or of being ridden by that demon of nerves, which is so often charged by the uncontrolled with their own deficiencies. He was helped in his heavy task by his gift of rapid concentration and his power of living in compartments. At Box Hill he would often play chess or whist with his sons during the hours between tea and dinner, but he worked late into the small hours of the morning, and he always had a strong antipathy to early rising.

There was an agitation at this time for the release of Mrs. Maybrick, who had been convicted of murder; the jury had found her guilty of poisoning her husband with arsenic, but the sentence of death was commuted to imprisonment; the case had been defended by Charles Russell and came up to my father for review during his period of office as Home Secretary. One summer evening while his children were sitting at tea on the lawn, he made an exception to his practice of not talking business; pacing up and down under the trees and taking one of his brief instinctive spans of exercise, he gave us an account of the arguments used in the case, and told us that Queen Victoria had shewn a special interest in it when he saw her at Osborne.

One afternoon in 1894 on my way back from football in the school field I remembered a letter from my father which had arrived just before the beginning of play, and which I had thrust hurriedly into my pocket: walking with a group of other boys, hot with the game

we had just finished and still smeared with its mud, I opened the letter and learnt at a glance that my father was engaged to marry Miss Margot Tennant. I had once had a glimpse of Miss Tennant, and I had heard my father speak of her. I remembered that this was the lady who had gone with Raymond one day to a sitting of the Parnell Commission and had tried to alleviate the tedium of a dusty afternoon by dropping her handkerchief from the gallery onto the heads of bored and weary men in the Court below, and I was cheered by the thought of this story about a personality stil unknown.

Chapter VI

A NEW OUTLOOK

My father's marriage to Miss Margot Tennant took place at St. George's, Hanover Square, in May 1894. As often happens, a large proportion of the advice which had been given by friends both of the bride and the bridegroom was opposed to the wedding, but from different points of view. She has related herself that Lord Rosebery and Lord Randolph Churchill, both friends of my father, deplored the marriage and were not alone in thinking such a union 'might ruin the life of a promising politician.' Her own friends also shewed disapproval and thought that she would be taking too many risks if she married a man who was not a sportsman, and started her new life 'charged with a ready-made family of children.'

Notes of warning were sounded on every side and not least by Mr. Gladstone, who wrote to Miss Tennant a few days before the wedding: "You have a great and noble work to perform. It is far beyond human strength. May the strength which is more than human be abundantly granted you." Jowett, the Master of Balliol, seems to have agreed with those who held that the main difficulty was the family of children; he compared the life she had lately been leading during

the London season with the harder tests of the life she proposed to undertake: "Is not the contrast," he wrote, "more than human nature can endure? I know that it is, as you said, a nobler manner of living, but are you equal to such a struggle? If you are, I can only say, 'God bless you, you are a brave girl.'"

I had not often been to a wedding, and for me, as was natural, this ceremony had a peculiar interest, since I had only once in my life had a glimpse of the bride. Two days' leave was given to Arthur and myself by our headmaster, and we travelled to London, much elated by this release from our Spartan routine and filled also with a shy, speculative curiosity.

At my father's flat in Mount Street we were attended by his valet, the inimitable S., whose mere presence in the room seemed to remove by magic all friction from the surfaces of life. When S. had laid out my clothes on a chair, by some miracle they achieved a new aspect, their lines appeared suddenly to be more subtly cut, their very texture many months younger than before they had been under his treatment. What exactly he did to them I never discovered, and I thought it almost impertinent to inquire; he would enter the room with a discreet knock, which was barely sufficient to wake me; he would bear away my clothes with soundless tread and as he made the circuit of the room, I never heard the thin, disturbing music of shoe-leather; the door shut behind him without any click of the latch, as though every bolt and hinge had been freshly oiled, and if one closed one's eyes, though his arrival was faintly announced with that of a new day, it was impossible to detect the moment of his going. My father often deputed to him the business of buying us

tickets for the theatre; it was he who paid our cab-fares, he who was now and then deputed to present us with money before we returned to school, a duty which he performed with a gesture of easy deference and with much less embarrassment than his master.

On this evening before his marriage my father was dining out, while I dined with my brothers in the flat and towards the end of the meal S. suavely provided us with tickets for a musical comedy. In the morning when he had left the room, I was rather startled by the appearance of my wedding garments, which he had borne in on his arm and laid with scarcely a rustle of sound on the chair beside my bed.

A lady, whom my father had asked to look after us, and whom we regarded with much devotion, had kindly consented to help us in buying our clothes, and she had chosen for our trousers a very peculiar tint of bluish lavender which she seemed to associate with a wedding. I had not been attracted by this material when I saw it unrolled in the artificial light of the tailor's shop, but our friend had shewn no hesitation and I had then been carried away by the conviction with which she had chosen it; but now, when I saw it made up into the form of trousers, no longer under an electric globe but reflecting with its sleek even lines the sunlight of a May morning, I began to feel a certain diffidence. When my father's valet deposited the clothes on the chair, he had done nothing to shew any inward criticism that he might be making. I never asked him what he thought of these garments, but from my knowledge of his qualities I felt fairly sure that he could not have taken a favourable view.

The pavements near St. George's, Hanover Square,

were crowded with spectators, and many notable men from widely different circles of the late Victorian period were passing through its doors—statesmen and politicians of both parties, men of distinction in the world of letters, professors, figures well known in the hunting-field, and many beautiful women. Margot relates that her old nurse was accosted on the threshold by 'a gentleman with a gardenia in his button-hole' who offered her ten pounds for her card of admission, and when the bribe was indignantly rejected, he offered to make a higher bid, but again with no effect. When the service was over, I remember being thrilled by the appearance of Mr. Gladstone as he made his way to the vestry, where the register was also signed by three other Prime Ministers, present and to come, Lord Rosebery, Arthur Balfour and my father. Mr. Gladstone had retired from office two months before, but in spite of his years there was still fire in his glance; as this dauntless old eagle rose from his place with a dark glow in his hooded eyes, his presence seemed to fill the aisle and to dwarf the stature of those among whom he was moving.

A reception after the wedding was held in Grosvenor Square at the house of Sir Charles Tennant, the father of the bride. My brother Arthur and myself had doubts as to the exact position of Grosvenor Square, and though it is only a few minutes' walk from the church, we took a hansom, as the best means of finding it; it was before the days of motors and we soon found our cab wedged in a long column of carriages with champing glossy horses and hansoms with sporting high-perched drivers and jingling silvery bells. The crowd on the pavements was probably much larger than it would have been in later years: several causes contributed

to this, and perhaps not least the fact that the public of that time was far more deeply interested in the personalities of political leaders.

When we reached the house, Arthur and I stood in the corner of a drawing-room : the situation was strange to me and in this gay wandering throng most of the faces were new ; I became more and more conscious of the somewhat startling tone of my lavender trousers, but I did my best to hide my legs and the offending garments in which they were sheathed behind a small table which stood near the discreet shadow of a curtain. After consuming some ices we soon began to take a more placid interest in the new and curious scene around us ; before long we saw the bride herself coming towards us, a short slight figure, vital and alert, passing through a throng of her friends, and when she greeted us, we were much attracted by the impulsive frankness of her manner which took shyness by storm, making a great appeal to the young, and often disarming their elders.

When the bride and bridegroom had left for their honeymoon, I returned with my brothers to our new house at Redhill. There was still another night of leave, and after breakfast the next morning, now that this exciting interlude was over and the appetite for a holiday had just been whetted, we were due to be absorbed again into the routine of our school. It was a clear morning in May ; I got up before dawn and went out into the rose garden, where the lawn was drenched with a heavy dew and the first rays of the sun were gilding the tops of the firs, hoping by this means to steal a few more hours of holiday. As I walked with cool soaking feet through the keen scents of a wood, I found it hard

to believe that that flashing microcosm of the Victorian world, which I had seen the day before, compressed within a few hours, was anything more than a swiftly vanishing dream that had dissolved again into air, like the mist that was fading away above the fields.

* * * * * *

Soon after their marriage, my father and Margot went to live at 20 Cavendish Square, a Georgian House connected by a long subterranean passage with a kitchen and stables in Henrietta Street. The courses of lunch or dinner used to rumble along this tunnel in a specially heated trolley, but they did not seem to suffer from the length of their journey and the bacon which appeared for breakfast very rarely contracted a chill during its transit under the earth. Above the tunnel was another delight for children, an ancient and fertile vine which grew in a small conservatory: it was a pleasant surprise to find a vine flourishing in the fogs of London, but though the bunches were numerous, it has to be admitted that the grapes of Cavendish Square had rather a tart flavour; though we often browsed on them, some effort of imagination was needed while they were being eaten, and in later years I began to sympathise with the epicure who announced when he was offered a bunch of grapes, that he 'didn't like taking his wine in pills.' The house next door had once belonged to an eccentric peer, and a strange feature in our landscape was a screen of frosted glass over thirty feet in height, rising almost to the tree-tops, an erection which he had built round his garden at great expense in order to indulge his passion for privacy.

I came to Cavendish Square on my return from

school, and a few days after the beginning of the holidays Margot took me out for a drive, which was to end—so far as I was concerned—with a visit to the dentist; but before this sombre goal was reached, I was given some interesting glimpses of Victorian London and heard a succession of swift flashing stories that drove the austere subject of dentistry out of my head. This was my first interview of any length with Margot and from my point of view it was instantly successful. We drove through the park in an open carriage and one of our horses was Molly Bawn, one of her old hunters. Hyde Park was gayer and more attractive then than it is today, and its roads were filled not with a stream of sleek hooting cars but with some of the finest horses in Europe, an inspiriting and beautiful sight as they trotted along with the leaves of the planes flickering on either side of them in the sparkle of the summer morning.

Margot described to me some of her many adventures in the hunting field, and told me how she had been dragged by a runaway horse through a field of roots, and in her effort to free herself, had 'pulled up a whole row of turnips.' Contact with such a personality as hers was for me an entirely new experience: the vitality of her presence, the originality of some of her phrases, and her flashes of rapid description would in any case have called up to the mind pictures not easy to forget, and on one who had been fed for some months on a parching diet of classical syntax they lost none of their effect. The soil was ready for water, but it had not expected such a vintage as this.

Now and then I asked her a question, but for the most part Margot conducted the conversation. When we

had driven through the Park, we called at some shops, and left cards at the houses of her friends; and then very suddenly, in the middle of a story, we pulled up at a door with a brass plate, the horrid goal of my journey, which for the last hour, under the spell of this new interest, had faded away from my memory.

At this time one of my favourite possessions was a small model of an express engine of the Great Northern Railway: it had shining pistons, a short squat funnel, and a long green boiler; it was propelled by steam and when its furnace was burning, after some preliminary puffing and snorting, it would move at a racing pace round the stone floor of the hall at Cavendish Square. This engine was very dear to me, but unfortunately it had only a very small allowance of line: it would start on its course with great spirit, as though it were ready to go to Scotland, but it was condemned by the curvature of the track to whirl round in short ignominious circles, and when it reached its maximum pace, there was always a danger of its leaving the metals, crashing on the stone slabs and spilling on the floor a long serpentine river of flaming spirits. My father, coming out of his study one afternoon to go down to the House of Commons surprised me in one of these experiments: I did not know he was in his room, and I felt at the time that I was putting rather a severe strain on his indulgence by conducting them in the hall of his house. But it soon appeared that there was no cause for anxiety; he was not fond of engines himself but he was sufficiently impartial to recognise such a taste in others without interfering with its satisfaction; putting his top-hat on his head, he surveyed the scene for a few moments with a slightly curious air, sniffed at the steam-

laden atmosphere, and without comment or criticism passed out through the front door in a mood of mellow detachment.

Margot, entering the house with a strange lady in a beautiful dress, narrowly missed a collision with my engine, but she quickly comforted my embarrassment: "You need some more line, don't you?" she asked: "Get as much as you like, and put it all down to me." Delighted at her generosity I put my engine through some of its gambits, imagining that she could scarcely fail to be conquered by its charm; but after paying it rather a hasty tribute, she passed on to her own room, and I had an uneasy suspicion that it did not really appeal to her as much as I had hoped.

A few days later a long van from Hamley's drew up at the front door and disgorged an enormous package containing forty feet of model railway lines, which seriously obstructed my father when he was trying to enter the house: the new railway was too big for the hall, and owing to Margot's generous impulse the Great Northern engine achieved new records in the open air without further embarrassment.

In August we went to Inverewe, a house near the coast of Inverness which my father shared with his brothers-in-law, Edward and Jack Tennant. There was a deer forest at Inverewe, good trout-fishing in the lochs, and fishing in the sea, which more than once resulted in an exciting battle with a conger eel. I never saw my father cast a fly, but he was persuaded one day to stalk a red deer: he had never fired a rifle before, but after a few practice shots at the target he consented to go out on the hill. The result was entirely successful, and when evening came, he returned with an expansive smile,



H. H. A. AND MARGOT ASQUITH
1895

ruddy and weathered by the wind, followed by a pony carrying a stag, which he had killed with his first shot. Later he killed a second stag, but he never missed one, and for the rest of his life he abstained from stalking, remaining content with a record which it was difficult to maintain and scarcely possible to beat.

When I told my gillie on the loch that my step-mother was coming out fishing, 'A' weel!' he said in his melodious, rather mournful voice, 'it's aye the ladies who get the big fish.' A few days later his superstition was confirmed, when Margot, trolling the same loch, struck an enormous *salmo ferox*, besides which my own modest half-pounders looked little more than minnows, and Margot's fish, when it was put in the scales, was proved to be the biggest of the season. In the art of fishing, like my father in that of stalking, Margot seemed inclined to rest on her laurels: the adventures of hunting were more in harmony with her temperament, and it is not perhaps easy to imagine her as a recluse with Nature, spending long periods in casting her fly among the whispering solitudes of a mountain loch.

The comparison and in many ways the contrast between Margot and my father could scarcely fail to be interesting to any student of human qualities. My father, though he had certain prejudices, had also a strong fibre of judicial impartiality woven into his nature; he was an inquirer, a weigher of evidence, searching for accurate truth and holding scrupulously the balance of the scales: by this means he reached the core of a subject with strokes that were at once swift and careful. Margot, on the other hand, without much time spent on inquiry, would often throw a new light on an old theme from an entirely unexpected angle:

she was not hampered by the formulas which are sometimes a danger to trained minds, and though her reading had been wide and various, her native freshness and originality had never been cramped by the rigours of discipline. Her vivid flash-light would sometimes illumine the whole subject, but more often, perhaps, its ray would fall with startling brightness on a single facet, or a hidden cavity, and by illumining one aspect throw a strange reflected light on the whole. These flashes, like the gift for epigram, would sometimes give a refracted picture, shot with queer startling colours and they rarely failed to amuse or surprise her listeners.

My father, who was entirely English by descent, had many qualities which are typical of his race: it was extremely rare to hear him give any full expression to his feelings and he had no tendency towards emotional display; the warm and generous qualities of his heart were masked by a fortress of reserve, which strangers who only had a surface knowledge and little imagination, sometimes regarded as the expression of his inner nature. There were moments when the walls of this fortress had the aspect of granite, but those who knew him well, knew also where to look for the windows. For Margot, with her vivid sense of the light and colour of life, emotion was closely bound up with its expression. Daringly candid in writing and in speech, she was rarely hampered by a sense of reserve; her generosity and courage were great, and these qualities combined with her natural kindness and loyalty gave a high value to her friendship, especially at times of crisis, when matters were put to the touch.

The sons of the family, like most school-boys,

refrained from making a display of their affections, and they did not fall on one another's neck except in the act of combat. 'Rags' were frequent, and points of difference were often settled not by the cut and thrust of argument, but by the ordeal of battle.

Chapter VII

WINCHESTER

I

In the autumn of 1894 I went to school at Winchester, and spent the day with three other new boys, but we soon found that in the language of this Mother of Schools we were no longer boys but 'men'. It is the custom of Winchester to promote her sons to manhood on the day of their arrival and the word 'boy' was seldom heard within her precincts, beneath the whispering boughs of her plane trees, or on the turf of her sacred meads.

New men arrived a day earlier than the others, and during this critical day we were treated with great kindness by my housemaster and his wife: but it was a time of suspense, and we were all uncomfortably conscious, as we sat at Mrs. Bramston's tea-table, that this was not yet the real thing: it was as though we were halting at a kind of half-way house between school and home, or standing on a diving-board, waiting until the time should come for taking the first plunge.

After tea we wandered about the long empty hall, while a pervasive smell of wet wood rose from the worn, splintered boards of the floor which had just been scrubbed as a preparation for the beginning of term.

Few buildings seem so empty as a school hall when the boys are gone; during the hours of waiting we formed a small encampment in the corner of it, and talked to one another with rather an artificial air of confidence, sharply aware of the vacancy around us and wondering how it would soon be filled. There were five studies for the prefects, but the rest of the men occupied little stalls at the side of the hall, each of which contained a desk, book-shelves, a seat, and a drawer.

At Winchester these stalls are known as 'toys'; in shape they have a resemblance to the partitions at a tavern though they are much smaller, and as they have no roof or door, they only offer the inhabitant a very limited privacy. The 'men' sleep in dormitories, which are known as 'galleries', and on this subject a spirited mother once uttered a bitter complaint soon after her son had gone to the school: "Poor darling A.!" she exclaimed, "they've put eighteen other boys in his bedroom!"

We read with respect the list of names carved on the boards above the stone mantelpiece, representing, year by year, members of the House who had also been members of 'Lords' (the name of the School XI) or played in Commoner 'Six' at football, a term which we looked at with wonder, knowing nothing except by distant rumour of the mysteries of that fastest of Winchester games which is played with a team of only six men a side, on a long ground sprinkled with sawdust and bounded by lofty nets. On the older names of twenty years before the gilt was worn and mellow, and streaked with smoke from the fire: many of them appeared more than once, they seemed to run in families, and here and there they were repeated, as another generation appeared; but

the names which we examined with deepest interest were those on which the gilt was still bright, the demi-gods of our new world, who had played cricket against Eton the year before.

On the evening of the second day the road outside the house echoed with the clopping of hoofs and the rumbling of wheels: cabs were busy outside bringing back the other men, and these soon began to gather in small spirited groups of two or three near the fire-place of the hall, while we sat near our 'toys', still uncertain about the fate that awaited us. The plunge, when we made it, was tepid rather than icy: we were not treated with aloofness, still less with any trace of incivility, but with a slightly formal, unvarying courtesy; we soon learnt that this treatment would continue for another fortnight, but when that time was over, we were expected to know the language and customs of the School and to begin our duties as 'sweaters' to the prefects. The task was not a light one, and we spent many hours bent over our 'notion-books', learning a list of words and phrases that were new to our ears; the list covered several pages, but it was full of queer interests, and learning it was the kind of work I rather enjoyed; at the same time we were all sharply conscious that we still stood at a half-way house, and that until that fateful fortnight was over, we were still only 'men' by courtesy and in a very superficial sense.

The life of a boy during his first year at Winchester and probably at most public schools during those days was rather Spartan in quality. Our duties began at 6.15 in the morning when we were roused from our sleep by 'first peal', a shrill frenzied jangle of sound produced by the butler who walked punctually at this hour along

the corridor outside our galleries lustily shaking his bell and summoning forty boys from their dreams with his demoniac clatter. In his many years of service how many thousand dreams of peace and seclusion must have been destroyed by that squat, benevolent executioner with his thin, waxed moustache, sturdily performing his duties day after day, year after year, decade after decade, always punctual to the minute and often to the second, but never in my experience anticipating the stroke of the quarter by the fraction of an instant.

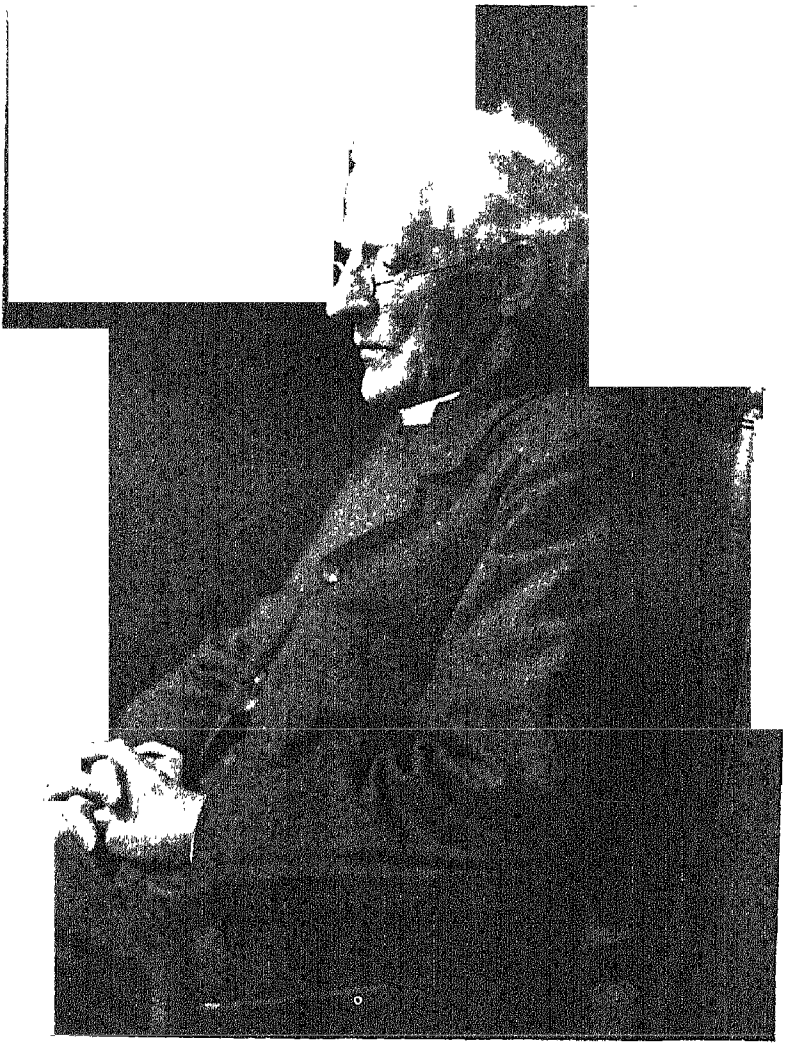
From that moment our duties began: we announced to other members of the gallery that first peal had sounded, a formality which always appeared rather excessive after it had announced itself with such deafening clangour and with no sign of huskiness in its notes: it seemed as superfluous as announcing an explosion to a householder whose roof has just been removed by a bomb. A quarter of an hour later 'second peal' was sounded, an equally violent display, torturing the drowsy ear-drum with a subtly different rhythm; but the butler's energy was justified, for long experience had taught him that ring as he might, he could never wake the whole house with his bell, and such is the curious power of habit that after a few terms of practice many men could sleep soundly and heavily through both peals without the least disturbance of their dreams.

At 6.20 a.m. we filled the prefects' baths, and every five minutes after second peal it was our duty to go round gallery endeavouring to rouse those who had so far defied the most hideous efforts that had been made to wake them. On our way out of the house we gulped down cups of cocoa; but we had to wait for our breakfast till twenty to nine, nearly two and a half hours

after the sounding of first peal; this hungry interval was filled by work in a class-room, by chapel, and by various lighter duties such as making toast for the prefects.

For the rigours of these early hours, which have since been modified, there were many compensations: though we attended chapel ten times a week, there were also two half holidays and we learnt to bless the 'red-letter' Saints, on whose days we were given leave. The prefects in our house were on the whole well chosen, and the one for whom I served as a 'sweater' combined great brilliance at cricket with a humane and graceful use of his powers. The prefect's power of beating was usually exercised with moderation and wisdom, often leavened by a touch of humour, which made its main appeal to the spectators rather than to the offender.

We were fortunate not only in our prefects, but also in our housemaster, the Rev. J. T. Bramston, who was a rare and delightful personality, beloved by many generations. He was seldom addressed by his surname, but by his Christian name of 'Trant', and that short word sums up for those who knew him, an individuality of curious and compelling charm whose dominant quality was a genuine delight in putting the work and service of his life entirely at the disposal of the men in his house. He had presided over the house at its birth and he continued to be its master for forty years; devoid of any tinge of cant, affectation or self-righteousness, the quality of his simple and natural altruism was one of which we constantly felt the benefit, but which few of us could hope to imitate. His sermons were written in the graceful English of a scholar, and some of them ranked among the best that we heard in



"TRANT"
(The Rev J. T. Bramston in later years.)

chapel; when he delivered them, his voice had an almost conversational note and was free from any hint of the curious conventions of the clerical tone.

When he returned from conducting the service or from taking his division 'up to books', he would lose no time in slipping on his old tweed coat, the garment in which we knew him best, and wreathing his face in blue spirals of smoke from a darkly seasoned pipe, which he drew from its pocket. Official routine and ceremony were a necessity that made little appeal to his nature: though he performed both with dignity, it was with relief that he used to put on that frayed and ancient tweed which seemed to be a symbol of the easy human relationship that was the essence of his life.

When he was helping us to prepare a chorus of Aeschylus or an obscure passage of Thucydides, he would sit cross-legged on the hearth-rug with the book on his knees, while the boys whom he was helping occupied, almost as a matter of custom, the best arm-chairs in his study; of these there was always an ample and excellent supply, but I seldom saw him use one himself; he seemed to think that their main purpose was to accommodate the boys in his house, and from generation to generation many football-players, after a hard-fought game, have relaxed their drowsy muscles among the cushions, while Trant, sitting with his slippered feet on the rug in front of them, assisted their weary brains and cast his calm reassuring light on the subtleties of Greek construction.

He was short-sighted, and when he was not wearing his spectacles, he gave an impression of blindness, but he was a steady and constant golfer, and in his younger days an experienced mountaineer. His finely

moulded brow and furrowed cheeks seemed to have gained a lasting tan from the smoke of many thousand pipes, the breezes of Westward Ho ! and the high clean air from the precipices of the Matterhorn. My brothers and I once spent part of our holidays with him in Switzerland, and I see him most clearly sitting on the rug in his study with a Greek book on his knees, or on the cropped grass near the outlet of a glacier, mixing white wine, liqueur, slices of fruit and chunks of fresh snow in a basin of indiarubber, in proportions only known to himself, and producing from this mixture a superb and rather intoxicating cup which by a miracle never seemed to contain a hint of flavour from the curious basin in which it was compounded, while his old guide stood at his side, jutting out his shaggy goat-like beard, his bronzed face twinkling with amusement.

To a stranger Trant's methods might appear too easy and friendly to secure authority, and not sufficiently distant for discipline. They depended for their success on the fact that they were the natural expression of his own personality, sincere to the core, and devoid of any hint of make-believe or affectation, qualities which are so quickly scented by youth. For this reason they were not methods that could be easily imitated, and so far as I know, no other don attempted to do so. Had the attempt been made by another, it would probably have failed, but with Trant there could be no doubt of its success. His mellow and easy spirit, full of sympathy and insight, presiding during the winter in the little study near the dining-room, and during the summer under the umbrella tree in the garden, seemed to pervade with its influence the whole atmosphere of

the house, and as years went on, he seemed to become part of the spirit not only of his own house but of Winchester itself. When he retired after more than forty years of service, it was as though a blind had suddenly been drawn over one of the windows of the school and a pillar of its architecture destroyed.

2

Time moved swiftly at Winchester: we who had so recently been new men, found almost before we knew it, that we were allowed to walk three in a line, a curious and not very enjoyable privilege, which was granted to those who had been at the school for three years. When at last we entered 'Sixth Book' and became prefects ourselves, with powers which were so supreme that it seemed highly improbable we should ever be able to exercise them again in any period of our lives, it was hard to realize that so great a change had happened in so short a time: our baths were now filled in the morning, we no longer toasted for others, but others toasted for us; and we only had to shout the word 'Here!' in a crisp and resonant tone to have twenty other boys charging down the passage in answer to our call. The very shortness of the interval which separates the average prefect from the days when he was a fag himself, the sharp force of recent memory, may well act as a safeguard against a too strenuous exercise of his powers, when he begins to look at authority from an opposite angle.

The cricket match against Eton, which in other days had been played at Lords, was now played in alternate years at Eton and on our own ground at Winchester, a wide sward beside the water-meads of the Itchen with

the tufted clump of Hills rising above it. At this match our emotions found an outlet, but they were even more intensely expressed at the football matches of Fifteens and Sixes. These were played between the three divisions of the School, and they remained domestic contests for the simple reason that though according to tradition this game had been handed down to us from ancient days, no other school in England had ever learnt its rules. The rules are not very complex, although they differ from those of other kinds of football, and they certainly contain surprises for the novice; but the game of Sixes, once learnt, is one of the best and fastest known to man.

Except for the excitement at matches there were few adventures. When the barracks caught fire in the town, and several thousand rounds of ammunition exploded in the flames, we crowded to the gallery windows, heard the gallop of the fire-engines, and had a distant view of the reddening sky, but compared to the conflagrations of exploding dumps with their trails of blazing cordite rising hundreds of feet into the air, which many of us were destined to see, it was a small and trivial spectacle.

Another incident of these years was an encounter for which I felt no spark of gratitude at the time, though I look back on it now with very different feelings. When our cricket-match against Eton was played on the Eton ground, we were allowed to spend the night in London, a coveted event, looked forward to for many dragging weeks before the day arrived. On this rare and wonderful night I had arranged to go to the theatre with my father and tickets for a comedy had been bought by Cave, our butler, who for many years managed all the economies of my life with a lavish hand.

When the day came, there seemed to be no need for worry—no nightmare chance of missing a train; the trains from Windsor to London were fast and frequent, and during the afternoon at Eton the evening, which held the final climax of the day, seemed safe enough. When I reached our house in London with twenty minutes to spare, in which to dress for dinner, the door was opened by Cave, and I asked whether he had bought the tickets.

"The tickets are here, sir," said Cave in a slow rather husky whisper; then for a moment he paused, and I did not like the expression in his face: his jaw was sagging, and there was a distant look in his eyes: he seemed to be preparing me for a shock.

'Are you feeling all right, Cave?' I asked, rather uneasily.

'Yes, thank you, sir. I ought to tell you, sir,' he went on, 'that Mr. Gladstone's coming to dinner.'

I had only seen Mr. Gladstone twice in my life, once at a meeting and once at my father's wedding, but I had never met him at close quarters; from my earliest infancy his name had been a household word, often in the mouth of my nurse, and I had thought of him as a cloudy daemonic force hidden somewhere behind a veil: but on this particular evening when I intended to go to a comedy with my father, this titanic presence did not seem to be a gift from the gods, but a supernatural disaster, an earthquake which had suddenly laid flat the simple plan to which I had so long looked forward, and I did not feel that a momentary vision even of the greatest statesman could compensate for its loss. When I asked Cave whether Mr. Gladstone was coming to the play, he dolefully shook his head.

I dressed for dinner and went downstairs into the drawing-room; it was a long room with many windows and at the far end of it Mr. Gladstone stood with his back to the white mantelpiece, talking to my father who was walking up and down, indulging in his steady habit of indoor exercise. Mr. Gladstone was in the last phase of his life, but there was still fire in his eyes, and his head looked magnificent with its broad brow poised near the light of one of the lamps; as I threaded my way down the length of the room, I was filled with a sense of the magnetic presence which seemed to pervade it; during my progress I felt as though my stature were constantly diminishing; I had thoughts of sudden flight, but something drove me on to persist in my course like a fly hovering towards the lip of an ancient volcano whose fires were still far from extinct, and whose lava was at any moment ready to boil over in a generous and scorching flood.

When I had advanced too far for retreat, my father turned and saw me; and at that moment he may have remembered our plan for the evening which must now have appeared almost absurdly trivial compared with the prospect that faced him: I was introduced to that aged and dauntless figure and was conscious, somewhat to my relief, of a spirit of mellow benevolence brooding above me, while he asked kindly questions about the cricket-match and the score made by Eton, where he himself had once been at school seventy years before.

The name and theme of the play to which at the time I attached such a thrilling importance, I have long entirely forgotten; but that glimpse of Gladstone, though it was only a matter of a few moments, could scarcely fail to last: its impression seemed to gain

emphasis with the passing of the years, when his true stature began to emerge above the smoke of party conflict, and it became clear at last how much Ireland would have been saved, and England too, if his countrymen had not rejected his advice.

My father used to come down, when he could, to watch the cricket-match against Eton, though during this period of almost continual crisis in the affairs of the Liberals he was sometimes prevented from doing so by political or legal business. A trivial incident happened at one of these matches which is worth mentioning as an illustration of his capacity for guarding himself against useless worries when he could do nothing to remove them. He was engaged to address an important meeting in the North of England and he had to leave the cricket-field at Winchester before the end of the game in order to catch the last possible train: as there was no air transport in those days and motors were still in the stage of early experiment, it was certain that if he missed the train, he would also miss the meeting and disappoint an audience of several thousands.

He had ordered a cab to take him to the station, and when we reached the place where it was to pick him up, there were only a few minutes to spare, but the cab was nowhere to be seen: there was no cab-stand within range, and the best chance was to wait until an empty fly appeared in the street or the defaulter arrived to keep his appointment. As the minutes ticked by, Margot not unnaturally shewed signs of considerable agitation, which increased when it became obvious that there was now a very strong chance of my father missing both the train and the meeting; my father, on the other hand, after his first moment of surprise, seemed to

regard this crisis which was not less exasperating owing to the triviality of its cause, with an air of benign detachment.

At last the cab arrived, the driver raced his horse to the station and the train was caught with a few seconds to spare: but during the long minutes of waiting and the uphill journey to the station behind a panting horse my father shewed no sign of anxiety; his attitude was tinged with a kind of mellow fatalism, an economy of worry which was part of his practical philosophy and became closely knit with his nature; he had prepared his speech and ordered the cab, he had done everything that he could to keep the engagement, and in such conditions as these, he had a rare capacity for detaching himself from circumstances which no effort on his part could alter, whose attendant worries seemed little more than a vacuous waste of energy.

3

My friends at school belonged to the older part of what is now known as 'the War generation': and most of them in years to come, when they were in their late twenties or early thirties, became subalterns in the army, if they had not already entered it as regular soldiers. During the 'nineties, like others in the outer world, many of us were beginning to react against some of the more stringent customs and taboos which are usually called Victorian. A work in general use at my private school was Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*: these Idylls bound in drab, discouraging covers of gray cloth were our staple holiday task, and as we read them I think we were conscious even in those days of the spirit of the great Queen, a phantom in lace and black rustling silk,

presiding somewhere above the Round Table and shaping with her influence the Knights of a rude and savage period.

The fact that Tennyson's Idylls had been set us as a task may well have stopped us reading them for pleasure, but, apart from this, many of us found the negative virtues unsatisfying when they were placed on so high a pedestal, and King Arthur himself was a figure that sometimes caused irritation; these faults did not blind us to the superb qualities of Tennyson's other poems such as *Ulysses*, *The Lotus-Eaters*, and *The Dying Swan*. At Winchester during these years Swinburne and Browning were widely read and their influence was often reflected in the verses that appeared in the columns of the *Wykehamist*. Though the Queen's presence seemed at times to brood above the *Idylls of the King*, in Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* and in the choruses of *Atalanta in Calydon* it was certainly not easy to find her influence, and when we were reading these, we seemed to be living in a different world from that which is usually associated with her reign; before that great period had come to an end, its children were already breathing draughts of a new air.

It has been said that one of Browning's many services to literature was to make slang 'respectable', and as my father had a great liking for classical style, I was interested to hear in later years his view on the comparative merits of Browning and Tennyson: on the supposition that only one of them could be admitted to Heaven and that my father held the keys of St. Peter, he said, with very little doubt in his tone, that his choice would fall upon Browning. Among the boys in my house the great Victorian novelists, Dickens,

Thackeray, Trollope and George Eliot were not much read; but there was a great demand for the works of Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, and the interest in the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, which were then being published in the Strand Magazine, was almost universal.

In later years I came to know Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and played several games of golf with him on the upper slopes of the Cotswold Hills. Of one of those games I keep a clear and delightful impression: it was summer, and below us, as we played, was a wide view of seven counties with their chequer of fields, their oaks and elms like dots on the landscape, dark acres of woodland, a score of villages and little towns of mellowed stone with their square-towered churches glinting in the sun. Above this lovely prospect Sir Arthur was playing a very remarkable game: he nearly holed an approach shot at the first green and he won the second hole by one of the longest puts I have ever seen; I felt now and then, in spite of the warmth and brightness of the sunlight, a curiously eerie sensation, as though one of those visiting presences, in which at that time he so strongly believed, were lending a hidden magic to his play—but later the spirit seemed to change its mood and during the last few holes his ball was piloted by a demon instead of a fairy and visited almost every bunker on the course.

When we had finished the match and were driving back to the valley, discussing a detective story by some other author, he suddenly turned his head and told me that he sometimes wished that he had never written a word about Sherlock Holmes. When I heard the author express doubt about such a creation as this, a character that may well have brought as much pleasure

to young and old as any other in modern fiction, I thought that for the moment his balance might have been disturbed by the heat of the day, the steepness of the hill, or the demon of misfortune which had pursued him so relentlessly during the last part of our game, but I soon found that none of these was the real cause. To attempt to defend Sherlock Holmes against his own maker might well appear presumptuous; but I suggested with deference that if he took this view himself, it was not one that was likely to be shared by any of his readers. He mentioned *The White Company*, which contains the song of 'the grey goose feather', as a book which he greatly preferred to his detective fiction, and I think he felt that his more serious work had been too much put in the shade by the celebrity of his most famous character.

I thought that a world without Sherlock Holmes would have a serious gap in it, a void which sooner or later would somehow have to be filled; but it was a relief to feel that though it was possible for the author to kill him with one stroke of the pen and revive him with another, he could never with all the pens in the world expunge him from memory, or make him vanish from the earth as though he had never been.

4

The most important event in my time at Winchester was the South African War, which began in October 1899 and lasted until December 1901. This war came far nearer to us than any of the ordinary political questions of the day, the Budget, the Reform of the House of Lords or the subject of popular Education, which we used to discuss at the School Debating Society.

Among all the cardboard boxes of the toy-shops I certainly never saw one which was filled, as in 'Saki's' story, 'The Toys of Peace,' not with soldiers, but with the figures of political leaders, the managers of banks and of limited companies, municipal worthies, the committees of feminine institutes, tax collectors and others, who are associated, rightly or wrongly, with a peaceful existence.

As 'Saki' shews, if such a box could be found, it could scarcely be expected to make a favourable impression on a boy: the pacifist uncle in the story presents his nephew with several black-coated civilian figures, including a model of John Stuart Mill, and another of a municipal dust-bin; when he returns to the room, he finds that the children are certainly enjoying their game, but looking closer, he discovers that the dust-bin has been converted into a fortress and that John Stuart Mill with the help of a copious dose of red ink has been transformed into a vermilion General.

The same instinct that transformed John Stuart Mill, produced also a sudden and miraculous change not only among the boys, but also among many of the dons who shared to the full our first thrill of excitement. When we reached the class-room of our tutor in German, who also taught the Army Class containing the candidates for Woolwich and Sandhurst, a new light shone in his eyes, which had not been illumined by the prospect of translating Goethe's *Italienische Reise*, the book which we carried under our arms: on that morning the *Italienische Reise* remained unopened on our desks, and we listened instead to a lecture on the position of the British outposts in the region of Mafeking and Ladysmith.

Our tutor pulled forward the blackboard and drew a map in white and coloured chalks, shewing the position of these towns and other strategical points; he seemed to be elated by the invasion of this exciting theme which suddenly gave a new colour to the routine of his life, now and then raising the chalk above his head with a gay reckless flourish, as though he were wielding a cavalry sabre. The lecture was lucid and interesting, and in some ways prophetic, though it was marked throughout by the inevitable mood of optimism in which wars are entered. He warned us that the numbers in our advanced posts were greatly inferior to those of the enemy and that until reinforcements could arrive we must expect a strategic retreat. Almost before we knew it, the hour of German had slipped away with a strange rapidity, vastly greater than the week before, when we had spent it in trying to read the mind of Goethe through the veil of a new language.

Both in the scale and the nature of the fighting the Boer War was obviously and widely different from that other war which was to follow it fifteen years later. Though there were isolated sieges, such as Ladysmith and Mafeking, on the whole it was a war not of siege but of mobility, conducted against 50,000 irregular cavalry, most of whom were mounted on ponies: in the Great War the capitals of the chief combatant states, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg were none of them taken or even besieged; but in South Africa Lord Roberts had captured the capitals of both enemies, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, long before peace was declared, affording a good example of the principle that the main objective in war is not the capital of the enemy but his army in

the field; when at last the War was brought to an end after three years of fighting the total number of British killed in action was only 7,790, a number vastly smaller than the losses on a single morning in some minor phase of an action on the Western Front, less also than the toll exacted during the last two years on the hospitable motor-roads at home.

In one case England was defending a small nation, in the other she was fighting one, but apart from the sharp contrast in circumstances, tactics and strategy, not the least difference between the two wars was in their ending: in both England was victorious, but the South African War was concluded by a peace of wise conciliation, profoundly different both in spirit and result from the dictated terms of Versailles, which prolonged the inflammation of war instead of healing it.

In spite of these differences, there was a certain resemblance in both cases between the fluctuating phases of emotion at home—in the wild enthusiasm of the first few months which seemed to give a sudden colour to the gray routine of ordinary life, to afford a purpose to those who wanted one and a stimulant to those who needed it; in the magnified elation at small successes; in the familiar figure of the critic at the breakfast table moving divisions as he cracks his egg-shell, the armchair tactician and strategist; in the making of generals into demigods; and then, as the slow drag of war was felt more strongly and the decision was still postponed, whispers of discontent, suppressed at first as unpatriotic, but gradually rising in strength, charges against generals of blundering, criticisms of the military mind which was now denied any spark of intelligence; and at last, the breaking of the graven

images by those who had set them up, the final degradation of the demigods by those who had worshipped them—far removed from the Tugela river or the blood-stained marshes of Ypres.

Soon after the fighting began, badges were sold in the streets and in the shops containing the portraits of British Commanders framed in the centre of the Union Jack, and their features which became famous in the course of a few weeks, peered out from a thousand resting-places, queerly but enviably throned on the lapels and blouses of the fair. More important for us even than this early enthusiasm, and far more significant than the excitement at home, which now and then boiled over in such curious excesses, was the publication of the first casualty lists, containing the names of men whom we had seen and known and for whom we had acted as fags during our early years at school.

Regarded as a game of tactics and strategy, illustrated on the blackboard in coloured chalks or drawn on a map, the War had seemed full of interest and fascination; but the casualty list was the other side of it, and this came so close to us now that other public questions, a penny or more on the Income Tax or a change in the laws of education, seemed absurdly remote and trivial, like pale academic phantoms hovering in the background of this new reality.

Chapter VIII

SOME OXFORD CHARACTERS

I

It must often be an experience of the young to feel a kind of homesickness for their school when they leave it for good, and I certainly had this feeling when I left Winchester and went to Balliol. When the time comes to leave, memory makes its selections and men are apt to remember the minutes of pleasure rather than the hours of routine: cricket on a summer evening, bathing in the clear, fizzing chalk-water of the Itchen, football on a December morning bright with frost and sun, or the chase after fritillaries and soaring white admirals among the beeches and holm-oaks of the New Forest, had all left behind them a touch of enchantment, which did not perish with the moments of the experience; but the consciousness that this was true was mingled with the knowledge that those moments would never be repeated.

During my first week at Oxford one of the older men came to call on me; I was poking my fire into a blaze so as to boil my kettle for tea, when my visitor pointed to some curious pock marks and scars on the sides of the grate and on the surface of the chimney above it:

"You see those marks?" he said. "Do you know how they were made?"

I disclaimed any knowledge of them.

"They were made by revolver bullets," said my guest, quietly filling his pipe and contemplating the scars with a reflective light in his eye.

I looked curiously at the fireplace which seemed a large target, even for a pistol.

My guest mentioned the name of a previous tenant of the room, of whom I had never heard, and for the moment he seemed to regard this statement as a sufficient explanation of the fact that my grate was spattered with bullet-marks.

"Did he use it as a target?" I asked.

"No—it wasn't that. When he got bored with the conversation, he threw cartridges into the fire; it was a quick way of stopping it."

It certainly seemed a 'quick way', perhaps the most rapid that could be devised, and to the many pitfalls and occasional deserts of conversation this ingenious expedient for bringing it to an end seemed to add new and startling excitements.

When a few days later the author of these explosions came to visit me, my feelings were curiously mingled as I pulled forward a chair—not too near to the hearth—and poured out a cup of tea.

The scars were still clearly visible on the sides of the grate; and he seemed to glance at them with a reminiscent eye; I noticed that one of his pockets was bulging downwards in rather an ominous manner, and I began to wonder in what direction the talk might best be guided in order to keep up to his standard, and avoid the possibility of casualties. But he did not

repeat his experiment; on the contrary he treated me and the other freshmen who were there, with an old-world courtesy that had a flavour of the eighteenth century, though I think he found us rather a silent company.

There were many raids at Oxford in those days and the object, in most cases, was to capture a trophy. On one dark evening an undergraduate had been lowered into a subterranean kitchen belonging to a neighbouring college, when those above felt a sudden tug on the rope and heard a protest rising from the abyss of gloom below: it was found that by some evil chance he had plunged into the centre of a huge stock-pot which contained the College Soup for the next day's dinner, and paddled in it knee-deep with pieces of meat floating round his legs, a fact to which the state of his trousers bore convincing witness when he climbed out again through the window.

On another night an attempt was made to remove the nose that adorns the gate of a distinguished college—but the raiders never got away with their strange booty: they were discovered before they could effect their purpose, and according to one account they were repelled by an electric current with which the nose had been charged by its defenders: but whatever the cause of failure, the brazen nostrils, scarcely less famous than those of Cyrano, still remained clinched in their ancient place, triumphant and unprofaned.

2

One of the most delightful men whom I came to know at Oxford was Aubrey Herbert, whose father, Lord Carnarvon, had been Colonial Secretary in the

ministries of Lord Derby and Disraeli, and was later Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.

When I first met Aubrey, I was immediately attracted by the queer elusive charm of his talk, for his mind seemed always to be exploring a new and strangely coloured landscape; in conversation, as in life, he had a remarkable faculty for avoiding the beaten tracks of other men.

Stories of mingled truth and legend were already gathering round his name. His nature seemed impatient of all that was gray and neutral in life and he was a rebel against the drabness of routine: not only did he look for hazards, but he had a strange faculty for finding them, as though Adventure had sought him out and claimed him for her own. With most of his generation, he was destined to find them later in a measure that might well have satisfied the hungriest appetite—but tinged with grimmer colours and tempered by the mechanisms of an age of iron.

In spite of the handicap which he suffered owing to a serious defect in his eyesight Aubrey won distinction as a speaker at the Union and at other debating Societies, and at the end of his Oxford career he was given a first class in History. One day, a short time before his final examination, I went to lunch with him and found him bending over an enormous sheet of paper, which was spread out on a table in the middle of his room. I asked him what it was: 'It's a chart of historical scandals', he said. 'I find it's the easiest way of remembering dates.' A glance at the sheet shewed that it was divided into many hundreds of squares, and there seemed to be no deficiency in the supply of links required for forming this strange chain of memories.

He was a good impromptu speaker and took part in many of the debates at the Union, making on one notable occasion a spirited defence of Sir Redvers Buller, who had been violently attacked by critics at home during the later phases of the Boer War. One of Aubrey's many-sided activities was the climbing of rocks, and he shewed a fine combination of daring and skill in scaling the cliffs of Portofino, where his family owned a villa which looked out across the bay to Lerici. Here he would sometimes invite his friends for reading parties and take them down the cliff to bathe after dinner, swimming for long distances through the warm spangled dark of the Mediterranean night; the sea was sparkling with phosphorus; each swimmer, as he plunged out through the gloom, seemed to splash up the light with his strokes, and each seemed to be followed by a long waving plume of it, green and faintly luminous, gradually spreading on the swell and fading away in his wake like the tail of a comet. On our return we used to lie down and smoke on a warm slab of rock and eat oranges freshly picked from the trees on the terraces above the cliff.

Aubrey delighted in strange dishes and also in strange pets; in London he would entertain his guests at a restaurant which provided bird's nest soup and Chinese eggs of unknown antiquity, and in Italy he was fond of watching his friends' reactions to the charms of the sea-urchin and to another dish whose main components were the tentacles of the octopus.

One day when I was walking with him near the harbour in Genoa, we saw in the window of a fish-shop an infant shark basking in a miniature tank: he was a sinister chinless little creature, no more than a

foot in length, but we had scarcely set eyes on him when Aubrey insisted on buying him, and we carried him home, tank and all, to the villa on the edge of the cliff.

To give him more room for exercise we housed him in a full-length bath—a startling apparition for any unwary guest who had not been warned of his presence. We fed him on pieces of raw meat: he waxed and throve, and after a short time our little pet had so greatly increased in girth and length, and began to emit such an acrid sharky scent into the corridors of the house that we had to consider the question of transporting him elsewhere. His consumption of meat was likely to become a serious factor in the household and it seemed probable that in a short time he would entirely outgrow the bath in which he had formerly gambolled at his ease.

At this crisis I had to return to England, but when I saw Aubrey again, he told me that he had solved the problem by launching him into the Mediterranean. It was a course of action more kindly to the shark than to future generations of bathers: I have sometimes wondered about the future of our pet, and his family life, and how many descendants he has today, as he cruises in full maturity from coast to coast, and when I read of a casualty from sharks in Ligurian or Tyrrhenian waters, or even further East, in the Ionian and Aegean Seas, I have often been conscious of a twinge of responsibility for my part in buying and nursing with almost paternal care that chinless little creature which we found basking with forked tail and ominous fin in the tank at Genoa.

An experienced Alpine climber once told me that though he had a good head for rocks, he sometimes suffered from dizziness when he was climbing a wall

but Aubrey had a good head for both crags and buildings; at Oxford he was one of a small but enthusiastic band of climbers who performed surprising feats of skill in scaling the grey flaking walls of her colleges in places where handholds and footholds were even harder to find than on the cliffs of the Ligurian Sea.

When he left Oxford, he went on a voyage to Japan. He was for some time attached to the British Embassy in Tokio and at Constantinople, travelled in Asia Minor, and made many expeditions to the Balkan States. He came to know the rulers of Turkey and Albania, who regarded him with good reason as a trusted friend: the adventurous air of these countries seemed to blow like a wind from another age and made a stormy appeal to the romantic side of his nature; his wide human sympathy and sincerity, combined with an instinctive conviction, felt by all whom he met, that he had no axe to grind for himself, won him many friends among Turkish soldiers and statesmen, and among the chieftains of Albania, a section of whom on one occasion approached him with the suggestion that he should become King of their country.

In 1911 he entered Parliament as Conservative member for Yeovil and represented it until his death in 1923. He was soon recognised as a leading authority on the affairs of the Near East. During the Balkan Peace Conference in London the Albanians appealed to him to save their country from being divided among the Balkan allies, and he made representations to Sir Edward Grey and the British Foreign Office; it was largely due to Aubrey that Albania's claims to independence were recognised, and he remained till the end of his life her stalwart and constant champion.

In the precipitous woods that rise above the valleys of Pixton, his home near the borders of Exmoor, he used to go out shooting with his guests, accompanied by a huge dun-coloured lurcher, with keen eyes and shaggy face, and an Albanian mountaineer with a knife at his waist, wearing the white pleated kilt of his native land. One day when we had been shooting, we went out to look at the morning's bag of pheasants which had been laid on the lawn outside the cottage, where we had just finished our lunch : the double rank of birds, which were otherwise in fine condition, made a most grisly spectacle, as a large number of them had been decapitated by the Albanian.

During the Great War Aubrey was in action as a soldier both at Mons and Gallipoli; and later with Colonel Beach and Lawrence of Arabia he took part in discussing with the Turks the terms for the surrender of Kut. Of his experiences during the War more will be said in a later place.

At Oxford Aubrey was a member of the 'Horace Club', a Society which printed a collection of verse to which its members contributed. Among the members were Hilaire Belloc, John Buchan, Harold Baker, Raymond Asquith, A. D. Godley, Maurice Baring and Laurence Binyon. Of the poems those which are probably best known today are the *Sussex Drinking Song*, and the poem on *The South Country*, both written by Belloc.

Raymond was in his fourth year when I came up to Oxford, and before he left, he had gained more distinctions than his father : he won the first Balliol Scholarship, took three firsts in the Schools, won also the Eldon and the Ireland, and after his fifth year was elected a fellow

of All Souls. Many years later his brother Cyril won the Hertford as well as the Ireland. Like his father Raymond was also elected President of the Union. His energies were very far from being confined to the sphere of scholarship and he was looked on by Mr. John Buchan (now Lord Tweedsmuir) and by other contemporaries as 'beyond doubt the most remarkable figure of his generation at Oxford'.

His sense of satire was easily awakened and was often pungent in its expression; he shewed great brilliance and lightness of touch in the delicate art of speaking after dinner and many of his speeches were intensely amusing, but when he was in a serious vein, his arguments were distinguished by great clarity and concision of phrase. Among his most notable speeches after dinner was one which he delivered in Balliol Hall when his father was present as a guest of the College, and another, made at a dinner to ex-Presidents of the Union, which he began by saying that others had risen to damn the Union by faint praise, but that he proposed to 'praise it by dim damnation'; and he was certainly true to his word.

His nature was one of many facets and various activities, some of which had very little to do with books: he was a good football player and played in College VI at Winchester; he was a keen golfer and was fond of real tennis, and in spite of a defect in his eyesight he was a good shot; he shewed skill and great daring as a climber of rocks on the hills of Westmorland, the mountains of Zermatt, and the uncertain crevices in the cliffs of Portofino. He was a quick and concentrated worker, but to fit into so short a time so many examinations and contested



AUBREY HERBERT
(Taken in Gallipoli, 1915)

elections at the Union, together with a full allowance of football, real tennis, and a free sociable life, would have been a strain on the toughest constitution. Something has already been said of his roving fancies as a boy; of his many gifts in manhood, the rapidity of his mind, and the swift felicity of his wit more will be said in a later place.

3

Towards the end of my first term I attended a debate at the Oxford Union with the intention of making a maiden speech. The Union at that time had the reputation of being one of the most critical audiences in England, and with some misgivings I chose a seat from which I thought there would be a chance, when the time came, of catching the eye of the President, who sat at the end of the hall, enthroned on his dais, with a minute picture of Lord Salisbury hanging on the wall above his head. The President at that time was H. T. Baker, the distinguished scholar of New College.

The subject of the debate has escaped my memory, but I have a very clear recollection of the desolate aspect of the debating Hall, when at last I caught the eye of the President and found a chance of making my speech. Half-an-hour before the hall had been packed and there had been an audience of several hundreds; but after the first four or five speeches they had streamed out through the swing-doors leaving behind them many ranks of empty, discouraging benches which seemed to emphasize the vacancy which yawned in front of the maiden speakers; there was in fact nobody left to address except the officers of the Society and a small disheartened covey of orators who had gathered

together as though for comradeship on one of the benches near the chair, where the President sat looking down at us, motionless, patient, darkly inscrutable, but apparently attentive, and politely concealing the weariness he may well have felt at this advanced stage in the debate.

I had been told that in making a speech the best method was to address the last rows in the audience; but when my turn came, I found it rather a disquieting sensation throwing out my words into the gaping vacancy of the back benches from which no sound returned of laughter or applause, nothing except the faint rustling echo of my own voice. In the rest of the hall there was no human form in sight except the marble bust of Gladstone, a Gladstone without his fire, looking out with frozen gaze across the rows of empty benches.

A few terms later, when I was a member of the Union committee, Aubrey Herbert, A. D. Lindsay, the present Master of Balliol, and William Temple, the present Archbishop of York, were also serving upon it. The personalities of Aubrey and Temple stood in curious contrast: Temple marshalled facts and arguments in an ordered series, and his speeches were marked by their force and lucidity. Aubrey did not care for statistics, and though he was interested by thoughts, he was often bored by facts; his course in debate in those early days was like that of a light schooner or a gay privateer veering and tacking on a sparkling sea, depending for success not on the weight of her massed artillery, but on swift and sudden surprises. Owing to his weak eyesight the notes for his speeches were written in large bold letters, clearly visible to some of his audience, but they

were of such a cryptic nature, that they conveyed little meaning to anyone except their author, and in later years, when he became an M.P., they were often written in Turkish.

In my third year, somewhat to my surprise, I was elected President of the Union. While I was still at Oxford, Lord Hugh Cecil and Mr. Lloyd George came to speak there, but they did not take part in the same debate. Both our visitors were in extremely good form, each in a widely different style. Lord Hugh's speeches were remarkable then, as in later years, for their incisive clarity in phrase and argument; it was a style that appealed very much to my father who told me that he regarded Lord Hugh as the best debater in the House of Commons.

Some part of Mr. Lloyd George's speech was devoted to the romantic subject of 'little England': in a few words he drew a picture of the 'black ships of Britain' sailing into foreign harbours, and his whole speech with its swift, striking metaphors and terse, vivid images had a great effect on those who heard it. He had then, as now, an extraordinary gift for getting rapidly in touch with his audience, adding power to his phrases by an expressiveness of face and gesture which seemed to put his whole personality into action at once. So it came that those who had been moved by his arguments, when they heard them, sometimes found their convictions wavering when they read them again in the cool reflective light of the breakfast-table: in this case, more than in most, the lines of printed words seemed to leave out a large part of the speaker's message.

The only statue in the Union at that time was a marble bust of Mr. Gladstone and I thought it would be a good

plan to raise subscriptions for a bust of Lord Salisbury, who like Gladstone himself, had been an officer of the Society. The appeal was successful, and the bust was made by George Frampton a short time before Lord Salisbury's death.

The Master of Balliol in those days was the philosopher Edward Caird who had succeeded Jowett in 1893. Caird had been educated at Glasgow University and St. Andrews, and later at Balliol. When an undergraduate at Oxford, he was a member of 'the Old Mortality Club'. The name of the club was due to the fact that 'every member was, or lately had been, in a weak or precarious state of bodily health'. Many of the members were marked for distinction, and they included among their number the poet Swinburne, Pater, T. H. Green, the philosopher, Professor A. V. Dicey and James Bryce.

Caird's biographers have related that the club was not well named, as many of its members were seriously deficient in frailty of health and were endowed with more than the average amount of vitality. Caird spoke of the meetings of this club as 'the very salt of their University life for some of its members', and of the free discussion at its meetings 'of everything in heaven and earth, the fresh enjoyment of intellectual sympathy, the fearless intercommunication of spirits'.

For more than a quarter of a century he had been Professor of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow University and he was Master of Balliol from 1893 to 1907. He had written several critical appreciations of the work of other philosophers, including his well-known books on Kant, Hegel, and Comte, and his work on the Evolution of Religion. He believed in the 'rationality' of the

Universe, 'an all-embracing unity on which every intelligible experience must rest'. At the same time he held the view that 'it is involved in the very idea of a developing consciousness, such as ours, that while as an intelligence it presupposes the idea of the whole and both in thought and action must continually strive to realize that idea, yet what it deals with is necessarily a partial and limited experience, and its actual attainments can never in theory or practice be more than provisional. . . . If in one sense, we must call this idea a faith, we must remember that it is in no sense an arbitrary assumption; rather it is the essential faith of reason.'

Some critics thought that his philosophy was too much devoted to system, and on this aspect some light is thrown by Professor MacCunn's memorial speech: 'He was not content to be a man of intuitions like Jowett, to whom he owed so much, or like Carlyle to whom he was fond of referring; nothing would content him but to be a man of coherent convictions. We cannot regret that—for it was that which made him one of the masters of constructive thought of his generation.'

In the administrative sphere Caird supported the extension of University privileges to women, a cause of which he was a constant advocate. He believed in tempering our masculine, semi-monastic lives by contact with the other sex, and gave large and hospitable parties at which we met the members of feminine colleges in the slightly unromantic atmosphere of the breakfast-table. It was his custom to listen to our weekly essays on general themes of philosophy or history. The story was told that T., an absent-minded undergraduate, having made no composition of his own, began to read

an essay by some other hand—on this occasion not to the Master but to the Dean—and the following dialogue took place:

T. (starting to read the essay): "As Bophocles once wrote——"

The Dean: "Bophocles? Mr. T., Bophocles? Surely you mean Sophocles?"

T. (looking conscientiously at his manuscript and then shaking his head decisively): "No, Sir, no; it's 'Bophocles'."

When I had written my first essay for Caird, I felt more than a twinge of diffidence as I approached the desk where he sat alone to listen to it, with tiers of books rising behind him. But in fact, though he was impressive by his distinction, he inspired affection rather than awe. The broad sweep of his mind was occupied more with the universal than with the particular; it is easy to imagine that when windows or lamps had been broken, he did not lay undue emphasis on the loss of these friable details in an ever-changing world, and in such cases the offenders would often be received with a kindly philosophic smile, betokening a nature which was far more ready to see extenuation than blame and truth rather than error.

Caird had a spacious brow, wide-set eyes, broad nostrils, and a copious white beard, and in certain aspects he reminded me of a statue of Socrates: though he had no pronounced accent, his tone and rhythm were those of his native land; he seemed to radiate a gentle air of tranquil benevolence which soon put a freshman at his ease; any one listening to the Master's words could scarcely fail to be conscious that this large simple presence, which for all its shyness and modesty

seemed to fill the room with its influence, was the embodiment of a noble and spacious mind.

The College over which he presided, opened its doors to the youth of many lands, and at one time or another, the sons not only of England, Scotland, and Ireland, but of many other countries and continents, East and West, were received by Balliol as their foster-mother, and read their essays to the Master. He died six years before the Great War, and he never lived to see that fine and varied youth of many nations to whom he had explained the philosophy of a rational universe, rising in arms to fight one another in a world where Reason seemed to have lost her Empire.

Chapter IX

A GENEROUS SETTLEMENT

I

With the death of Queen Victoria in 1901 there passed away the symbol of an epoch and also, to some extent, a symbol of stability in Europe. When she was borne to her grave on a gun-carriage followed by a retinue of kings, many minds looked anxiously into the future and there was a feeling of fate in the air. It seemed at that time that England had scarcely a friend in the world: her campaign against the Boers had made her unpopular not only in France and Germany, but also in many small states of Europe who usually wished her well; indeed, putting aside the merits of the case, it was part of human nature to sympathise with a small society of farmers who were fighting single-handed against a great Empire.

The thirteen years that followed from the death of the Queen to the catastrophe of 1914, were marked by strange bubbling ferments at home, which in the case of the conflict between Lords and Commons, the crisis in Ulster, the strikes of Trade Unions, and the agitation for Woman Suffrage, often reached the boiling point and even passed beyond it. These turmoils at home were accompanied by periods of dangerous tension abroad, one

of which, the crisis of Agadir, nearly brought Europe to war in 1911.

The Queen had not looked with favour on many of the movements which were already beginning to make themselves felt during the last phase of her reign. She disliked the idea of Home Rule, detested the prospect of a conflict between Lords and Commons, and looked with extreme distaste on the plan for emancipating her own sex. Nor is it likely that she would have viewed with much favour the tactics of force which were used by the militant suffragettes within a few years of her death.

Methods of force in politics carried out by a mob, a private army, a lonely assassin, a tyrant in power or one hoping to gain it, are as old as history; but in the twentieth century the earliest instance of flouting the law in England on at all an extensive scale was 'the passive resistance' to Balfour's Education Act of 1902, which compelled the Nonconformists to pay rates in support of Church Schools. These sturdy fellows held to their principles and notwithstanding the fact that execution was being levied on their goods, they persevered in their resistance.

The methods of the militant suffragettes were very far from being passive: they were the tactics of a feminine offensive of an entirely new kind carried out over a long period of years with great courage and tenacity, and a strangely various fancy. Of these tactics I had direct experience, of which some account will be given of later.

In the year 1903 two events happened which were each in its own sphere of great historical importance. In the spring of that year Joseph Chamberlain made his

famous speech at Birmingham in favour of preferential Tariffs and taxes on food, a speech which gained emphasis from the fact that Balfour, his Prime Minister and Leader, had made a speech on the same day in an entirely different sense. This speech of Chamberlain widened the growing cleavage in the Unionists, and by uniting the Liberals in the cause of Free Trade it performed in little more than a day, a task which the internal forces of that distracted party had failed to carry out in the course of the last ten years.

The other event, which was of a very different kind and received at the time much less attention, was the flight of Wilbur and Orville Wright at Drayton in America: it was made in a machine heavier than air driven by a petrol motor and the distance was 260 yards. The length of their flight was no more than that of a good drive at golf, and by many people at that time it was regarded as of little more importance than an acrobatic feat performed at the circus at Olympia or a trick at Maskelyne and Cook's. Very few foresaw or dared to predict how far it was going to lead; that in a few years' time England would lose her full privilege as an island, that it would be possible for a foreigner to cross her defending seas without meeting a battleship, or that the world itself owing to the speed of the new invention would be swiftly contracted to the dimensions of a single province.

The motor-car at this time was beginning to develop, but like the aeroplane, it was still in an elementary stage, a curious type of chrysalis, out of which something else was to grow.

I do not think that my father welcomed these inventions with much gratitude; here the conservative

element in his nature came into play and he was cautiously sceptical about their practical future. When motors were still in a very primitive phase, he was persuaded by his children to hire a car. He had taken a house near St. Albans, and the object of our first journey was to reach the links at Cassiobury, for golf, a game to which he had been guided by his wife, had now become his favourite form of exercise.

The car, when it arrived, bore no more resemblance to a modern motor-car than Stephenson's 'Rocket' to the engine of a modern express: there was nothing the least rakish in its appearance and no hint of stream-line could be seen in any of its contours; the engine was high above the ground somewhere in the neighbourhood of the front wheels, and the passengers were perched behind on the seats of an adapted wagonette; the wheels were about twice the size of those in a modern model and the springs were eccentric and uncertain in their action, but I remember experiencing a strange sense of triumph, as we bumped along the macadam surface, crunching the stones with our solid tyres, and when we were on level ground, now and then achieving a pace of fifteen miles an hour. Our queer, panting hybrid seemed to have some of the caprices of an animal, and our first journey was not without incidents: horses shied and backed away, when they saw their new-fangled rival claiming a share of the road, and more than once we heard the jeers of their drivers who disliked this strange inconvenience which had invaded the highway, but they were not yet filled with any vague premonition of what was to follow it.

On upward gradients we often came to a halt and we sometimes got out to walk so as to lighten the

strain; but our chauffeur was an excellent mechanic and when the motor stopped, a few minutes' attention from him would usually coax it into action again and still its capricious temper, while my father, shewing no sign of impatience, would walk up and down near the hedge, ruminating perhaps on the points he meant to make against Chamberlain in his next speech. On our first journey there were several halts: our monster had to be coaxed to cough its way up the hills of Hertfordshire, and it was very late when at last we arrived at the links of Cassiobury; before we had finished our round the sun was already setting, and long oblique shadows of my father, studying the slope of a green and standing stalwartly above his goose-headed putter, were thrown in a strange caricature across the golden brilliance of the turf.

My father soon found amusement in this new method of transport and his equable temperament did not seem to be chafed by its many unexpected delays: he decided to buy a car, and a Darracq, a Siddeley, a Napier, and finally a second-hand Rolls Royce of a pre-war vintage followed one another in quick succession.

His fondness for the sea did not extend to the air: he never went in an aeroplane and I think he felt that man was not intended to fly; he thought the aeroplane a necessity in war, but in time of peace, he did not regard it as a desirable means of transport. The gramophone made no appeal to him and though there was often a gramophone in the house, I never saw it in his library; I do not recollect anyone putting on a record when he was in the room, and had such an action been committed, I doubt whether he would have stayed to listen. The cinematograph, which was then concerned with the art

of silent motion, was making rapid developments; it always attracted his interest and this increased in later years when his son Anthony became a Producer of films; but my father could never be called a 'film-fan', though to the end of his life he was always extremely fond of the theatre.

2

A month after peace had been signed with the Boers Lord Salisbury retireb: Arthur Balfour was appointed Prime Minister and entered on a strangely troubled period of office. After Chamberlain's speech in favour of Colonial Preference it seemed as though a leader in a team had turned round to face its driver: but Balfour's position soon became worse than this; the jolting coach which he drove, had many horses and a large proportion of them broke the traces and galloped off across country in different directions, leaving their vehicle precariously balanced on the brink of the ditch. First Chamberlain resigned and then came the resignations of six Free Trade Ministers including the Duke of Devonshire.

It is difficult to see what Balfour could have done to solder up such a cleavage in the unity of his party, but if he played for time, there was still a hope that he might be able to concentrate the interests of his scattering followers on some other question. Before the resignations he had begun by promising an inquiry: a blue-book had been issued, and he had himself published a pamphlet called 'Insular Free Trade', attempting a compromise under the name of 'Retaliation'.

This compromise was rejected by several Unionist Associations, and Balfour's difficulties were increased

by the revolt of the Ulstermen against the scheme for devolution in Ireland and by the campaign against Chinese Labour which had been introduced on the Rand. He tried to divert the mind of the country from Free Trade to the question of Ireland, but that question had been before it too often and most electors were by now heartily tired of the affairs of their charming but eccentric neighbours: they wanted now to vote about themselves and about a subject so pleasantly practical as the diet at their own breakfast-tables.

At the end of 1905 Balfour resigned. The most important work of his Government had been the Entente with France, the creation of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. He was criticised for having stayed in office too long. In the field of political tactics there is always a chance that some new issue will suddenly arise which in its turn will heal an old cleavage and split the opposing party, and Balfour was in many ways an optimist; but here fortune went against him. He described the Liberals as 'apostles of imperial disintegration', but the voters did not take this description seriously: the general election of 1906 had the curious result that the country appeared to be voting for the 'disintegration' of the Empire by a majority of 220, a figure which did not include the Irish and Labour allies of the Liberals.

Few Governments in English history have possessed ministers of such varied talents as those who served under Campbell-Bannerman in the new Liberal Government and in its core were three Liberal Imperialists, Asquith, Grey and Haldane. With Asquith at the Exchequer, Haldane at the War Office, Grey Foreign

Secretary, Morley Secretary for India, and Mr. Winston Churchill Under Secretary for the Colonies, the Government was rich in the contrast of personalities and in the variety of their distinction, and their wise and careful leader soon won the affection of his difficult and spirited team. The Cabinet did not seem to be weak at any point; it had at its command not only heavy artillery but quick-firing guns and leaders of light horse: the ruthless flashing sallies of Mr. Lloyd George, the massive industry of Haldane, Grey's clear sincerity of speech and action, the intellectual power of Asquith and Morley, and lively phrases newly coined from Mr. Churchill's mint of satire were all at the service of the same cause. The Liberal ship was then leaving harbour with a fair following breeze, but in front the sky was heavy with mist and gathering clouds: it was clear enough that there were storms ahead, but few could have foreseen at that time to what a maelstrom or clashing waters her course was set.

Some of the Bills of that Government which caused sharp controversy at the time, are now forgotten, but not its most vital measure, the grant of self-government to the Boer states who had been defeated after their long gallant struggle in the South African War. This bill raised a storm of protest and was denounced by Balfour as 'a reckless experiment'. History has shewn that generosity to the conquered is an experiment which is likely to win a success greater in quality and more enduring, both for victor and vanquished, than any measure of coercion; and of this principle the bold grant of self-government to the Boers survives as a classic instance. This bill was in fact the prelude to the Union of South Africa which was carried into effect by my

father two years later, and not the least of its results was that at the time of the Great War General Botha and General Smuts, who had formerly been England's most gallant enemies, were now numbered among her most distinguished friends and advisers.

At this time, when my father was Chancellor of the Exchequer, I remember a small incident which illustrates his curious power of detached concentration. I had just returned late at night from the play with one of my brothers and some friends of our own age, and we were sitting in the small library at Cavendish Square, when he came into the room, sat down at his writing-table, picked up a pen and asked us several questions about the play and those who had acted in it. He continued writing and talking at the same time, and it was only by accident that we discovered that he was preparing the speech which he was to deliver on introducing his Budget the next afternoon. The presence of a loquacious and youthful company in his room at such a moment must have been extremely inconvenient, and if we had had a notion of the truth, the library would have been swiftly emptied; it is typical not only of his concentration but also of a certain reticence in his nature that he should not have given us the least hint of the arduous task on which he was engaged until one of us happened to ask him what it was.

Campbell-Bannerman had accepted office at great personal risk and against the warnings of his doctors. During March 1908 the political situation was critical, the condition of the Prime Minister was too serious to enable him to discharge any duties, and King Edward VII was abroad at Biarritz. Coming home one evening

from my work in chambers at Lincoln's Inn, I found my father pacing up and down a small sitting room at the back of the house: he was obviously worried, and contrary to his usual custom he began to talk about his political difficulties: he was acting as deputy for his leader, and he told me that the absence of both the Prime Minister and the King added very greatly to the normal complications of Government.

A few days later, on the 27th of March, Campbell-Bannerman sent for my father and had a moving interview with him of which Mr. Spender has given an account: 'He spoke of his funeral and then turned the subject deliberately to things of the hour, patronage, titles, bishoprics, and ended by thanking Asquith for being "a wonderful colleague, so loyal, so disinterested, so able." "You are the greatest gentleman I ever met. This is not the last of me; we will meet again, Asquith," were his parting words.'[1]

Campbell-Bannerman resigned on the 2nd of April, 1908, and died three weeks later. Of many tributes to the dead leader one of the most significant is contained in a letter written by General Botha to my father two years afterwards, when the Bill for establishing the Union of the South African Colonies had passed both Houses of Parliament. "There are many today," he wrote, "who claim a larger or smaller share of the credit in connection with the realisation of Union in South Africa, but this one thing is certain, that only the Liberal policy of your Government has made that Union possible and in South Africa at all events the great majority of the people fully appreciate this. Only after a policy of trust in the whole population of the Transvaal

[1] *Life of Lord Oxford*, I, 196.

and O.R.C. had taken the place of one of coercion could we dream of the possibility of a Union of the Colonies, and above all of the two white races. My greatest regret is that one noble figure is missing—one man who should have lived to see the fruits of his work—the late Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. For what he has done in South Africa alone the British Empire should always keep him in grateful memory ! "

General Smuts, in a speech in London in April, 1917, made another tribute: ' I hope,' he said, ' when you draw up a calendar of Empire-builders, you will not forget the name of Campbell-Bannerman . . . who achieved one of the wisest political settlements in the history of this nation.'[1]

Such were the tributes of two distinguished soldiers to the ' apostle of imperial disintegration ', to a humane and generous peace, a fine extension of the old Roman precept, ' to spare the conquered and defeat the proud '.

[1] *Recollections* by Lord Morley, II, 145.

Chapter X

ASQUITH AND BALFOUR

I

After Campbell-Bannerman's resignation the doorstep at Cavendish Square was besieged by a crowd of journalists, but my father according to some of his critics was never sufficiently yielding to the claims of the press, and on this occasion he presented a stubborn front to their advances. He stole quietly away to Biarritz on a Sunday afternoon, and on Monday, the 6th of April, 1908, he kissed the hand of King Edward on his appointment as Prime Minister. The weather according to his own account was 'vile beyond description', with pouring rain and blustering wind, as though it were prophetic of the storms that lay ahead, through which he had to steer his ship before he reached the end of his long voyage.

He now had at his command the same powerful team that had served in Campbell-Bannerman's Government. But there was a shifting of places, and the ministerial change which had most meaning for the future was the appointment of Mr. Lloyd George as Chancellor of Exchequer. The contrast between the qualities of the Prime Minister and his chief lieutenant was strong and obvious at almost every point, and this contrast was

reflected in their styles of speaking. Asquith was a statesman of an older school; he disliked personalities and combined the clarity of ordered thought with a certain classic reticence, which in no way diminished the force of his argument; his appeals to feeling, when they were made, were restrained in quality, but often powerful in their effect and stirring the depth rather than the surface: many instances of this quality are to be found in his well-known tributes to Campbell-Bannerman and Alfred Lyttelton and also in his speeches during the first phase of the Great War. At that time, as in later years, Mr. Lloyd George's great natural gifts depended little on ancient forms: his style was romantic rather than classical, and his swift vivid touches of impressionism, reinforced, as they were, by a fine power of gesture, and a quick sensitiveness to the momentary reactions of his audience, were extraordinarily effective in seizing and holding the attention of the vast meetings which he addressed.

He seemed to personify the spirit of the modern Demos more closely than any other politician. He did not share my father's shyness of the press or his distaste for personal invective, and in later years he was in much closer touch with the world of journalism than his leader: though he was extremely sensitive to the movements of public opinion, he had shewn high courage in defying it during the South African War when as a 'Pro-Boer' he deliberately steered his course against the gale instead of following before it. As in real war, so in the bloodless campaigns of politics, the co-operation of a variety of arms is one of the main conditions of success: there was a risk that the difference in the qualities and gifts of these two men might produce

a cause of disharmony, but it was clear also that this very difference, each providing something of what was wanting in the other, might become a source of strength difficult to resist.

Another remarkable figure who was given promotion by my father on the formation of his first Government was Mr. Winston Churchill, who was appointed President of the Board of Trade. Mr. Churchill had taken part in the famous charge of the 21st Lancers at the battle of Omdurman and his love for the colours of adventure had not been sated by the ardours of the South African War: his half-humorous delight in the conflicts of faction, his brilliant gift for phrase, his youthful and vital spirit which, as the years passed, never seemed to know the lethargies of middle-age, all made a strong appeal to my father, who regarded him with a lasting affection which was not displaced by the many tripping-stones of public life.

After his return from Biarritz my father was not long in completing his Government. His family said goodbye to the vine-tree at Cavendish Square, where they had lived now for fourteen years: the old house was let and my father entered for his long tenure into the narrow mysterious doorway of No. 10 Downing Street.

At this time the burden that had to be borne by the Prime Minister was becoming greater year by year and soon reached proportions for which it would be hard to find a parallel in the Victorian period. My father, according to the testimony of his colleagues, clove his way through this heavy and varied work with great rapidity and thoroughness, but though I lived with him for two and a half years at Downing Street, I never discovered exactly how and when he did it.

He had a large writing table near the window of one of the big rooms on the first floor looking out on the Horse Guards Parade, but he did not often use it for serious business except in the early hours of the morning when most of the household had gone to bed; and when I returned late from a play, I sometimes found him sitting there in solitude near a shaded lamp with a pile of red despatch boxes at his elbow. The light fell on his hair, now tinged with gray, and on his broad massive forehead, and beneath it on a sheaf of papers and on a collection of curious little objects, minute crystal animals, and midget silver figures, which were arranged in strangely assorted groups in front of his blotting-pad. These little objects were the gifts from large numbers of his friends and they were received with genuine pleasure; like the toy creatures on the mantelpiece of a nursery, they increased from year to year and formed a merry contrast to the solemn despatch boxes that hemmed them in on either side.

During the day-time this room upstairs was liable to invasion and my father did a large part of his work in the Cabinet room. The younger members of his family occupied a small library on the ground floor looking out on the garden: the ceiling of this library supports the full weight of the cabinet itself, which meets in the room above; but the structure is extremely solid, and during those critical years, when meetings of the cabinet were frequent, no whisper of its discussions, no distant rumbling of its differences, was ever borne down to the ears of the younger generation below.

My father had a great liking for the company of young people; among his son's contemporaries at Oxford he was much attracted by Aubrey Herbert and

Archie Gordon, and he used to delight in the queer original wit of the impromptu verses which Arnold Ward would recite at amazingly short notice, discharging this alarming task with great coolness and often startling the company by the ingenuity of his rhymes. This, however, is far from being an exhaustive list of his many guests of the younger generation, children of his friends and friends of his children. This youthful company was often to be found at lunch or dinner mingling with men of letters, soldiers, statesmen, and politicians beneath the aloof, surveying eyes of Pitt which looked down at them from his picture above the mantelpiece, and most of his younger friends readily understood that questions of politics were very far from being the Prime Minister's favourite topic at dinner.

2

During the feverish and restless period before the War my father's most distinguished opponent was Arthur Balfour. Balfour entered the House of Commons as a young man, but the first ten years of his public career, like Asquith's early years at the Bar, were not marked by any conspicuous success, and towards the end of this time he told John Morley that he had come to the conclusion that as a public man he was a failure and that he had no aptitude for politics. My father relates that people smiled when Balfour was appointed Secretary for Ireland in 1887, but few observers in those days understood the real qualities of his nature: he had been supposed to be a sceptical and detached philosopher with his thoughts too remote from the dust, by some he had been regarded as an idler, and few had suspected that he would win a reputation as a

man of firm and decisive action, or that such tough and tempered mettle lay beneath the fine courtesy of his nature.

In the early 'nineties, at the age of 43, Balfour became Leader of the House of Commons. Asquith in a letter written to his wife expressed a high estimate of the qualities of his opponent who was one of her personal friends: in my father's view the function of the Tories at that time was neither to originate nor 'to resist *à outrance*' but 'to forestall inevitable changes by judicious compromises in the interest of threatened classes and institutions': 'Given the conditions,' he wrote, 'I am not sure that A. J. B.—if he will learn to take himself and his party a little more seriously—is not an almost ideal Tory leader. All the same I think him very unlucky to have to start just now.'

In spite of the Conservative disaster of 1905 the charm of Balfour's personality and the swift brilliance of the powers which he shewed in debate were not long in regaining his influence in the House of Commons. He remained leader of the Unionists until three years before the War and in his speech of resignation said that he did not wish 'to be suspected of suffering from the most insidious of all diseases—the disease which comes upon those who, without losing their health or their intellect, nevertheless get somewhat petrified.'

It is scarcely necessary to say that at that time, and long after it, the fine freshness and originality of his mind shewed no symptom of this crippling disease, and that he lived to hold high office almost continuously during the Great War and for some years after it ended. When he resigned his leadership my father paid a tribute to his opponent's personality, 'so invaluable to his

friends, so formidable to his foes: so interesting and attractive to friends and foes alike,' and to the 'unique combination of gifts and powers' which gave him such clear distinction.

Balfour and Asquith were both statesmen of the older type: both had a distaste for personalities and both liked to observe the established rules of political combat. They were very far from being politicians of a specialised kind: both were distinguished among their contemporaries by their high intellectual power, and the range of their minds was in no way confined to the main sphere of their energies. There were, of course, many points of contrast between them: my father had been delayed at the start of his career by the necessity of earning a living; with Balfour there had been no such need, and in my father's case this necessity had not been entirely a handicap. In debate their style of speaking was widely different: my father's tendency was to confine himself as much as possible to the main points of his case, taking few technical issues, and endeavouring to breach his opponents by driving home his central arguments with clear and decisive vigour: Balfour's fine and subtle dialectic was a graceful weapon 'of the icebrook's temper', and its flashing thrusts, when he meant mischief, were swift and deadly; he was fond of skirmishing, and sometimes he seemed to play with his weapon, just for the fun of doing so, slightly above the heads of his audience.

My father's interest in the classics was wider in scope than that of Balfour, who was never a classical scholar; but in music, philosophy, and science the reverse was certainly true. It was sometimes said that Balfour's interest in poetry was confined to the works of Pope

but this is too strict a limit; I was told by one who knew him well that he was also an admirer of Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth. Outside the field of politics my father was in many ways more conservative than his opponent and this conservative element was perhaps nurtured and encouraged by his classical training; his interest lay more in the field of literature, those vistas of the past that are still alive, than in the discovery of the secrets of nature and the exploration of new country by scientific invention. At Oxford my father had been given a first in Greats, but though at intervals he continued to read philosophy, it was far from being one of his dominant interests; Balfour gained no distinction at Cambridge at all comparable with his talents, but he soon won a name by his *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* and philosophy continued to be one of the main interests of his life.

Balfour had a love for his country which was not the less intense because it was not marked by the flaring signs of Jingoism which appealed to a section of his party; the higher qualities of his vision and the broader outlook of his statesmanship were sometimes regarded by the extremists as a sign of weakness, though he had shewn in Ireland that when he thought it was required, he was a man of firm and resolute action. Among his followers there was always a section who would have preferred a downright, hard-hitting leader, even if he were something of a 'bruiser', to a man of intellectual distinction, whose fine shades of meaning they were sometimes at a loss to understand and whose mind often seemed to move on a different plane from their own. There was a larger proportion of this element among the electors than in the House of

Commons, and Balfour's style of speaking was better adapted to the House than to the rough and tumble of platform oratory, a field in which the quarter-staff is apt to be of greater service than the darting flash of the rapier which he had made his own. His detachment sometimes led to misunderstandings in political life, as in the case of Lord Lansdowne's famous letter in November 1917; Balfour's remoteness seemed to prevent him, now and then, from foreseeing the reactions of the public to his own words, or from fully understanding them when they took place, as in the case of his first *communiqué* on the battle of Jutland. Of his action during the political crisis of 1916 when he threw his weight into the scale against Asquith, who had been loyally defending him in his post at the Admiralty,—more will be said in a later place.

In his '*Defence of Philosophic Doubt*', '*The Foundations of Belief*', and later, in his Gifford lectures, Balfour gave a convincing proof that metaphysics can be discussed not only without uncouthness, but in a style at once clear and harmonious, combining simplicity of form with a fine delicacy of light and shade.

To many who had not read the book and perhaps to some who had, the title of the *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* gave a false impression: Balfour was often regarded as a man who was rarely in a state of full conviction about questions on which the 'plain man' entertained firm and crystallised views. It is true that he was not inclined to accept opinions, whatever their authority, without a fresh and independent scrutiny: he was sceptical about the claims of 'unassisted reason'; but he used this scepticism as a weapon with which to defend the spheres of ethics and theology from the

threatening invasions of science, and his doubt did not extend to such paramount questions as the existence of the Deity or of a real scale of ethical values. In his view there was no such thing as 'unassisted reason', and he believed in a theory of inspiration; in one respect he was more than a doubter, in another very much less. A short quotation indicates his theory:

"It is not, I think, inaccurate to say that every addition to knowledge, whether in the individual or the community, whether scientific, ethical or theological, is due to a co-operation between the human soul which assimilates and the Divine power which inspires. Neither acts, or, so far as we can pronounce upon such matters, could act, in independent isolation. For unassisted reason is, as I have already said, a fiction: and pure receptivity it is impossible to conceive. Even the emptiest vessel must limit the quantity and determine the configuration of any liquid with which it may be filled."[1]

Balfour's natural interest in the advance of science was not limited to any particular branch; it gained further stimulus from his friendship with his brother-in-law, Lord Rayleigh, and to a certain extent it was practical as well as theoretic.

My father, through no act of his own, had won the reputation of being a practical mechanic owing to a journalistic rumour that he rode a safety bicycle constructed entirely with his own hands. In fact he never indulged in this extremely hazardous adventure; the building of bicycles was never one of his hobbies, and though an attempt was once made to persuade him, he was never induced to ride one. Balfour, on the other

[1] *Foundations of Belief*, p. 319.

hand, was devoted to his bicycle, which before the days of motors often accompanied him on his visits to houses in the country. Music was one of his chief pleasures and he took a greater interest in the development of the gramophone than was ever shewn by my father.[1]

Another widely different subject of applied science, in which Balfour took a practical and technical interest, was the art of gunnery. He was in fact Prime Minister when experiments were being made with a view to rearming the Field Artillery with a new gun; the choice lay between the eighteen-pounder and a lighter type of weapon, and it has been related in his Life how after considering the evidence, he preferred the eighteen-pounder, the gun which was used, and greatly multiplied, during the Great War.[2] Of his keen inquiring interest in the sphere of gunnery I had myself some direct experience during the War, which will be told in its place. The developments of physics and biology, and the inquiries of Psychical Research all fell within his capacious sphere of interest; in the field of politics he charged Liberalism with dwelling 'in an imaginary future', but in that of science there is some reason for believing that he dwelt there himself.

During the period of political tension on the subjects of Mr. Lloyd George's Budget, the Parliament Bill and the Home Rule Bill, I frequently met Arthur Balfour at Stanway, the home of Lord and Lady Wemyss, near the Cotswold Hills. During those years when political feeling was running so high that the extremists on both sides were barely on speaking terms, I often had the

[1] See *Arthur James Balfour* by Mrs. Edgar Dugdale.
[2] *Ibid.*, I, 426.

curious experience of playing golf or tennis with Arthur Balfour on one Sunday, and golf (but no tennis) with my father on the next.

These were both games to which Balfour shewed an almost passionate devotion: he was not at all inclined to be critical of his partner at either of them, but at both he seemed rather a harsh critic of himself, and if he thought that he was playing below his form, a faint melancholy would sometimes descend upon his countenance, though it seldom lasted for long.

I recollect one curious instance of his self-possession in adversity at a game of golf. He had been invited to open a new course on the Cotswolds by driving the first ball: there was a large crowd on either side of the tee and at a short range in front of it was a Cotswold wall of rough-hewn stone through the crevices of which we could see twinkling patches of the whitening sky above the valley. To discharge the task of making a ceremonial drive can hardly be pleasant to the performer, however wide his experience, and even the sensation of watching the unfortunate player surrounded by a hushed crowd, silently speculating on the length of his shot, is not a happy one. Arthur Balfour surveyed the spectators for a moment with his courteous and benevolent smile, chose a place for his tee and bent his tall slim figure to address the ball; but there was an evil spirit in the air: the tension of the silence was broken by a sound very different from the sweet song of a ball that is truly hit: there was a harsh ugly whirr—the menacing, churlish note of a half-topped shot which struck the stone coping of the wall in front of us and bounded back in Puckish mockery.

Arthur Balfour lifted his head in the wind and stood

silent for a moment looking up at the scudding clouds: after that moment of reflection he rejoined his partner with a sigh and they walked together to the spot not many yards away where his ball after its short brisk adventure lay twinkling demurely in the grass. During the rest of the round he scarcely missed a shot, and after a few holes he seemed to have forgotten completely that at its most critical point, and there alone, the Devil had had his way.

On one occasion when he was walking out of the House of Commons he met the secretary of one of the Ministers searching for his chief, and to save him trouble wandered back into the House in order to find him, a slight but typical instance of the courtesy and thoughtfulness he shewed to younger men. A large proportion of the guests at Stanway belonged to a generation who were his juniors by more than thirty years, and after dinner, when the ladies were gone, I sometimes felt that we were listening to him with more respect than he really wanted. His talk often had a lambent, lively quality, that can be felt also in his written work, and the freshness of his point of view made an especial appeal to the young.

From his mood of philosophic detachment he sometimes returned with startling suddenness and would shew by a pointful observation that some part of him had still been present and had never lost the thread of what was going on around him. I remember one evening when he was stirred from this mood by the action of a waiter at an hotel, who was about to fill the glass of a delightful lady beside him with a very good vintage, which he thought she was incapable of appreciating, for, though many women were his friends, his liking

for them did not apparently include an admiration for their palates: suddenly returning to earth, he raised his hand in protest in order to prevent such an act of profanity, but the lady shewed her mettle, and in spite of his distress, she insisted on her glass being filled until the bubbles were level with the brim. He was fond of dogs and in the middle of his talk he would now and then bend down to address a large red chow of notable charm—alas, now gone to her fathers—who in company with other animals used to wander round the fringes of the table at Stanway.

He liked to question those whom he met about their own subjects, and whether these were connected with literature, or games of skill, science, or philosophy, they all fell within the range of his wide, inquiring interest. I remember a discussion carried on between him and Sir Charles Eliot, then our ambassador in Japan, the author of a well-known book on the teaching of Buddha: the subject of their talk was the philosophical element in Buddhism as compared with that in Christianity, but Arthur Balfour's part in it was mainly interrogative, and he threw on it swift, darting lights more by the suggestiveness of his questions than by the expression of his own opinions.

I did not often hear him discuss politics, but on one notable occasion in 1914, shortly after the outbreak of war, he made an exception and openly expressed his view on the weights and balances of our international policy. The men of the party were sitting round the table after dinner, when he suddenly began to talk on this subject. I had never heard him discuss foreign policy before, but such a departure from his habit seemed natural enough in those strange days when all the proportions of life had

been changed, as it were, overnight, and fell suddenly into a new perspective. At this early date his eyes were already set on America, where later he was to do such signal service; he emphasized the importance of bringing America in on the side of the Allies, but whether she joined us or not, he assumed that the Allies would win; and when that happened, he said that it was most important that Germany and Austria should not be weakened too much, as this would have the effect of making Russia too strong and upsetting the balance of power in Europe.

Russia seemed to be much in his mind, and in those early days few foresaw the danger that her armies would be dissolved and fade away beneath the flood of revolution, seeping up behind them. We of a younger generation were listening to him with intense interest, but when he had been speaking on this theme for only a few minutes, he was interrupted by the sudden entry of the parlour-maid, a woman of firm countenance, whose commanding eye contained an unmistakable hint that by this time she had expected the room to be empty—and this hint, to the disappointment of everyone, was immediately taken by Arthur Balfour. He cut short his talk, almost in the middle of a sentence and surveyed the youthful company benignly through his glasses: but that evening we heard no more about foreign policy.

It would have been hard for one who did not know him, to say at first sight whether he was a philosopher or a statesman, for something of the distinction of both was curiously mingled in his appearance; he often showed the detachment of a philosopher, but he could never have been taken for a recluse. He was charged sometimes with laughing on a slightly mechanical

note at something which did not really amuse him, but this charge was exaggerated, and it could surely be brought against most people who have lived for long in the arduous school of political necessity.

The high and subtle qualities of his mind were not those which make a great popular leader and he could not often rouse the fire of enthusiasm which creates unity by fusing different metals into one alloy. Of necessity there is often a rift between the principles of public policy and those of private action; with Balfour this gap seemed wider than in the case of many other men; he sometimes shewed a distrust of generosity in the treatment of other countries, such as Ireland or the Boer States, which was in no way typical of his outlook on private life; though he was intensely patriotic himself, he sometimes seemed to under-estimate the mystic force of this spirit in other nations, its desire for expression, and its power of resisting pressure from without. His great personal charm, which was felt by most who met him, was reinforced by a fine courtesy and thoughtfulness in small things, which flowed through natural courses to people in every station of life.

Chapter XI

FORCE AND FERMENT

I

My father had to cope with many movements of force while he was in office, menaces from abroad and agitations at home, and of these the most peculiar and in some ways the most embarrassing was the movement of the militant suffragettes. They regarded him, with good reason, as a staunch opponent, and marked him down as one of their main targets. As a result, wherever he went, he was usually followed by discreet detectives, and when I played golf with him, they were frequently to be seen hovering near the flanking bunkers in order to protect him in the freedom of the course.

In spite of these precautions the suffragettes often came very near to reaching their objective. He was once engaged in trying to hole a putt on the links of Lossiemouth, when he was attacked by two young women: this attack for the moment put him in a position of difficulty: to use force against the young women was against his nature notwithstanding the fact that they had already broken the rules of chivalry by attacking an elderly statesman; his putter was a formidable instrument made of ancient applewood, but nothing

could have induced him to employ this noble club for such an ignominious purpose. On this occasion, however, his embarrassment did not last for long: by good fortune one of his daughters was near at hand, and advancing to the attack with spirit, she successfully repelled his assailants.

Another incident of a more sinister kind happened while we were sitting at dinner at Lympne Castle, which stands on the hill above the Romney Marsh. In the afternoon I had been playing golf on the links at Littlestone with Herbert Gladstone, who was at that time Home Secretary in my father's Government. When our game was over and we were about to leave the club-house, I heard a shout from Herbert who had reached the front door some way in front of me, and when I reached him, I saw a spectacle which filled me with wonder: from the steps outside two frenzied suffragettes were trying to force their way between the folding doors with the obvious intention of making an assault on the Home Secretary who was pressing the full weight of his sturdy form against the doors in an endeavour to keep them out.

When I came on the scene, the contest was very evenly balanced, and Herbert's gay and sunny countenance wore an expression of the most comic embarrassment. He was short in stature, though extremely strong, and as is often the case with men of muscle, his figure had assumed a rounded and happy contour during his later years; but the situation soon became threatening: the two women outside obviously meant business; they succeeded in prizing the doors a short distance apart, and while Herbert stood spread-eagled in front of them with a hand on each door, one of them inserted herself

in the crevice between and began butting him in the diaphragm with her head. I managed to get hold of her wrist; she was of very slight build, but she fought with a strange demoniac frenzy, which I had never met with before and hope never to see again. When she stopped to take breath, she told me that I was a coward for 'laying hands on a woman', though my utmost effort had been to hold her wrists so as to stop the violence of her assault: 'But you're not such a coward as Gladstone,' she said, casting a fiery glance at him, as we made our way to the car.

'How's that?' I asked.

'He daren't,' she answered.

This strange flicker of logic which flashed out in an interval of her frenzy, was not her last attention. She picked up some large angular stones that lay at the side of the road and threw them at us as we drove away. Though she claimed male privileges, luckily for us, she had not developed a male style of throwing, and though the range was short, her aim was extremely erratic.

On the evening of this queer adventure we were sitting at dinner at a small table near a window of the dining-room at Lympne. The sun had set and darkness was falling, spreading a purplish shadow over the wide levels of the Romney Marsh. Herbert Gladstone had given a description of the strange sequel to our game of golf and my father was sitting at the other side of the table in one of his mellowest moods; during the few days of his holiday he had banished his many cares and responsibilities into a compartment of their own, where in some mysterious way they seemed still to receive attention. But the peace that had fallen on the garden outside,

broken only now and then by the baa-ing of distant sheep, was suddenly shattered by a note very different from that of a ewe calling for her lamb: a few feet from the place where my father was sitting there was a crash of broken glass, some window panes were smashed to splinters, and a large piece of road metal, an angular fragment of granite, which had clearly been aimed at him, missed its target, broke my neighbour's plate, scattered a lady's dress with a copious fountain of soup, and bounced off the table to the other side of the room.

My father remained unmoved, steady as a rock, regarding the scene around him with a faint sniff of amusement, while the younger members of the party rushed to the window; but the women had chosen their window well: it was a narrow casement, through which no pursuer could squeeze himself; we threw it open and heard in the garden outside a shrill whoop of triumph accompanied by the quick patter of retreating feminine feet. It was very dark in the woods below the house, and we searched them for some time with a motor lamp, but without success. I heard afterwards that the tactics of their retreat had been more ingenious than those of their attack: they had moored a boat in the darkness under the bank of the canal that runs across the Romney Marsh, and while we were searching the wood, they had quietly escaped by water.

During the year 1912 these attentions increased in violence and their scale was greatly extended. When my father went to speak in Dublin in July of that year, two incidents occurred either of which might have had a most serious result. On the day before the meeting a group of women tried to set fire to the Theatre Royal

at which he was engaged to speak, but their attempt was luckily a failure. It was on this visit also that a woman aimed a hatchet at my father while he was driving through the streets of Dublin accompanied by his wife and John Redmond. The hatchet, like the lump of granite at Lympne, was badly aimed and instead of hitting my father, grazed the cheek of John Redmond, but luckily it did not cause him any serious injury. When my father attended meetings at Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester the militants welcomed his arrival by attacking pillar-boxes, spreading false fire-alarms, and setting fire to a football stand. One of the most notable incidents, a startling example of this new type of political tactics, was the case of a suffragette who was convicted of loitering with intent to set fire to Nuneham, the home of the Harcourts.

Until August 1914 the campaign of the militants continued: grandstands, stations, hotels, and other buildings, public and private, were set alight by these torch-bearers of the feminine cause; even churches were not spared; one church was burnt, another was injured by a bomb, and a bomb was placed under the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey. The campaign was extended from pillar-boxes to works of art by the great Masters and in the National Gallery an assault was made on the Venus of Velasquez and the glass of the picture was broken.

The movement of the militants was marked by a strong element of fanatical martyrdom and by the courage that goes with it. In its passive form this quality shewed itself in the refusal of food in prison and the endurance of the horrors of forcible feeding, which led to the passing

of the 'Cat and Mouse' Act in 1913, under which prisoners who endangered their health by starving themselves, could be released and arrested again when they were well enough to return to prison. One of the militants shewed fanatical courage of a most positive kind by throwing herself in front of the King's horse while it was running in the Derby, imperilling the lives of many jockeys and at the same time sacrificing her own in order to obtain the greatest possible publicity for her cause.

Most people would now agree that the militants had a well-founded grievance against the way in which the constitution was working in their own case. Bills for Woman Suffrage had been debated in Parliament during the reign of Queen Victoria, but the question at issue was one which cut across the ordinary lines of party cleavage: as a result these measures had been regarded by a large section of both parties with feelings of embarrassment; though they had the support of many Liberals and many Conservatives, no Government of either party was ever found united in their favour and no single party could give them its official support. It had become almost a convention of Parliament to talk them out and block their progress.

In June 1912 the Liberal Government introduced a Franchise Bill which abolished plural voting, and my father gave a pledge that supporters of the movement should have an opportunity of moving an amendment for the enfranchisement of women and that the decision should be left to a free vote of the House. But it was held by the Speaker in January 1913 that such an amendment, if it were passed, would alter the character of the Bill to such an extent as to put it out of order.

This ruling by the Speaker roused a storm against my father among the extreme supporters of the movement, but in fact it took him by surprise, and as a result he felt bound to withdraw his own Franchise Bill: "As a matter of common honour," he said, "and common sense, if we agree that the discussion of the woman suffrage amendment is precluded by the ruling which you, Sir, have given, we cannot in fairness proceed with the bill as it stands and with its other provisions."[1]

During the next session a fair opportunity was given for debating the question, when a private member's Woman Suffrage Bill came up for the second reading and was rejected by a majority of 47. During the debate Grey spoke in favour of the Bill, and my father against it: one of the main interests of the issue and also of the debate was that the line of cleavage was utterly different from the divisions of ordinary politics; there was a certain freshness in the air when political friends became for a few hours political foes, when followers boldly dissented from the arguments of their leaders, and sheep and goats were found, by a queer conjunction, in the same pen.

It is certainly arguable that the entrance of women into the sphere of men may dangerously limit the beneficent influence that they possessed before. This was my father's opinion, and he asked in the debate whether the grant of the suffrage would 'enrich' our life, or raise and refine the standards of 'chivalry, courtesy, and all the reciprocal dependence and reliance of the two sexes,' or strengthen the fabric of the State. His answer was 'No'; but at the same time in face of

[1] House of Commons, January 27th 1913.

a settled demand by a large majority of women he suggested that he might alter his view.

It is difficult to say how far the Women's campaign would have succeeded if it had been allowed to run its course and had not been cut short by the outbreak of the Great War. There is, of course, no doubt that their violence had alienated many masculine supporters and also a large number of their own sex: in attacking such various forms of property as churches, pavilions, grandstands and pictures, and in threatening the Coronation Chair, it might well be argued that they were estranging from their cause classes of great numbers and influence, giving offence to Churchmen, the lovers of cricket, football, racing, and art, and loyal adherents of the King.

It may be considered further that the English nature, though reasonable, is also stubborn, and detests the idea of giving way to violence—even when it is administered by feminine hands. But these singular events were unique in history, and though they irritated large sections of the people, they had the effect at the same time of removing the question of the suffrage from the sphere of theory into the close focus of practical life: women's health might be ruined in prison, and serious injury might be done to elderly statesmen, as happened to Augustine Birrell, who suffered a most brutal assault,—but the publicity was enormous; the issue was no longer academic; it had now become a regular part of the news which people read at breakfast, almost a part of the air that surrounded them, which they breathed into their lungs whether they liked it or not.

When Woman Suffrage was granted in 1917, public opinion had changed owing to women's work at

munitions and in other masculine spheres: but it is open to doubt whether this work alone, good though it was, would have earned them the right to vote if the question had not been so extensively advertised before the outbreak of war by the violence of their militant sisters.

Now that they have won that glittering prize, for which they endured so much, it is to be doubted whether more than a small minority set much store on its possession. It is certainly not a common experience to see a woman in despair because she has forgotten to exercise her new and precious privilege. The main interest of the change lay in its symbolism: it seemed to carry with it a change in manners and morals, which had little concern with the casting of votes for one party or another. By the increase of their power in one direction women became conscious of an ambition for wider liberty in others: of this desire the beginnings have already been seen, and its final development may reach far out into the future and deep down into the roots of human relationship.

2

In a cartoon by Mr. Max Beerbohm my father is threatened from five directions at once—by a peer, a trade unionist, a suffragette, a German soldier and Sir Edward Carson; the weapons raised against him are various—a hunting crop, a pickaxe, a hatchet, a sabre and a blackthorn stick, while he sits in the centre, reflectively smoking his cigar:

> "Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
> From its firm base as soon as I."

His resolutions were grounded on careful thought, and once made they were sturdily maintained: he was not easily diverted from his path either by political bluff or by real menace, and beneath his mellowness was a strong foundation, a massive base of tempered reason, difficult to shake or assail. He was very human, but he was so remote from frenzy that he did not always understand the full force of its grip on others; when passions were roused, he was sometimes inclined to overestimate the effect of the broad rational principles which governed his own actions.

To give a full account of the measures of his Government from April 1908 to August 1914 would be outside the scope of this book, but the reader may be briefly reminded of a few. In the sphere of Empire one of the most vital measures was the Act creating the Union of South Africa, which was passed in 1909. In the same year, after sharp divisions of opinion and agitations for a smaller number, it was decided to lay down eight dreadnoughts, a powerful addition to the Navy; the Anglo-Japanese alliance was renewed for ten years in 1911, while in the field of defence on land Haldane carried out his historic scheme of Army reform which had been begun under the previous Government.

The high tension of political feeling during the first part of this period was mainly caused by the Parliament Bill for limiting the veto of the House of Lords; this, in its turn, was due to the rejection by the Lords of a large proportion of the Liberal programme, including a Budget, although the Liberals had a huge majority in the country. When my father had won two successive General Elections in 1910, the Parliament Bill was passed, and thenceforth the Home Rule Bill was the

main subject of conflict. In the sphere of Social reform two of the most important measures were Asquith's scheme for Old Age Pensions and Mr. Lloyd George's Act for Health and Unemployment Insurance.

Much of the frenzy that was roused at the time was probably caused more by the invective of politicians than by the real substance of the measures. My father relied on argument rather than invective, but he was, on the whole, an exception to the general rule of those days. Under Mr. Lloyd George's Budget, which roused such a storm at the time, it was proposed to raise the income tax on a graduated scale from 9d. to 1s. 2d. in the pound, and the duty on spirits raised the price of a bottle of whisky to the exorbitant cost of four shillings; it was true that the Budget contained some very obscure duties on land values the effect of which few could understand, but taken as a whole, it would have been regarded not only with equanimity but with intense relief by the modern tax-payer.

What was then depicted as Hell may now be regarded as Elysium, and we may well look back with envious eyes at the merciful dispensations of those golden days. My father's Old Age Pensions Bill which provided five shillings a week for poor people at the age of seventy, as a final goal for their labours, would not be regarded today as 'dealing a blow at the Empire which might be almost mortal'; but this was the comment made by Lord Rosebery at the time. Schemes of Home Rule were described by Balfour as 'the dreams of political idiots', and it may well be wondered what words were reserved for the Treaty with the Irish Free State which still lay in the lap of the future. The principle of the Welsh Church Bill has

since been declared a success, but in those days, according to F. E. Smith, it 'shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe'. On the side of the Government Mr. Lloyd George's attacks on the landlords roused hilarity among the Radicals and troubled the breakfast tables of the Whigs.

A climax was reached in July 1911, when my father rose in the House of Commons to make a carefully reasoned speech on the Parliament Bill and for half an hour his voice was drowned in a spate of organized uproar. In this extraordinary scene of disorder a prominent part was taken by F. E. Smith, a future Lord Chancellor, and by others who held responsible positions in later years.

The tensions and tumults of our elders seemed to have very little effect on the friendships of my own generation. At the dances in London, unperturbed by the rowdiness of their seniors, the sons of 'Hedgers' still danced with the daughters of 'Ditchers', Home Rulers with Unionists, and Liberal youths with Conservative maidens. For the next three years until August 1914 the dances went merrily; and it was well that they did so: for most of the dancers the time was short, and few could guess what lay in wait for them, so close in front, almost in the foreground of their lives.

Among my friends at this time were Aubrey Herbert and 'Ego' Charteris[1]: both were Conservatives of a humorous and imaginative kind, and it was refreshing to hear their points of view in an atmosphere that was singularly free from the rancour and prejudice that marked the public debates. In 1908, soon after leaving Oxford, Ego went to Washington as

[1] In 1914 he became Lord Elcho.

honorary attaché to the Embassy. He returned to England in 1909, and read for the Bar. As in the case of many who did not survive the War, it is impossible to say and vain to guess what course his life would have taken. He had a clear integrity of spirit, and some rare quality in his nature left on those who knew him an impression that none can forget. The wide range of his humour and his power of amusing self-depreciation were some of the many gifts that made him delightful to his friends, and his fine sense of human comedy added colours and lights and shades to the ordinary incidents of life.

In July 1910 I had the great good fortune to marry Ego's sister, Cynthia Charteris, the eldest daughter of Lord and Lady Elcho.[1] From a political point of view our position was peculiar: whilst my father was the author of the Parliament Bill, George Wyndham, who was my wife's uncle, was one of the leaders of the "Die-Hards" who had vowed to resist it to the end. Bestraddled between these poles of difference we spent much of our time during the next few years in the atmosphere of both opposing camps; such a life is a good cure for extremism in either direction and it may well be recommended to those who desire to take a detached and moderate view.

It would be hard to imagine anyone less like a professional politician than George Wyndham, either in his appearance or in his outlook on the world. In political cartoons he was sometimes shewn as a typical guardsman, but here again the target was missed. He seemed to belong to a less specialised age than our own, when men developed many sides of their nature at once, and

[1] Afterwards Lord and Lady Wemyss.

it was more possible than it is today for one man to express himself in a single life as a statesman, a soldier, and an artist; there was an element of all these in Wyndham, and the artist in him was in frequent revolt against the routine of the statesman. At my first meeting with him, and even more when I stayed with him, I felt that he had little in common with a world of mass-production and centralised business; it would not be difficult to imagine him in one of Marlborough's campaigns advancing to greet the enemy and courteously offering the first shot in the battle to the other side, but to many of his friends this chivalrous and generous figure seemed to belong to an earlier period and to have leapt suddenly, armed with sword and pen, out of the mists of the Middle Ages.

His ancestry was English, Scottish, Irish and French, the Irish strain coming from the romantic figure of Lord Edward Fitzgerald who joined the rebels and died of his wounds in prison in 1798. Ireland, in different days and for another cause, brought calamity to his descendant, and in 1905 the storm roused among extremists by Lord Dunraven's very moderate scheme of devolution forced Wyndham to resign his office as Chief Secretary. The temper of Ireland at that time, whether in Ulster or the South, was not indulgent to moderation.

There is a story of an Irishman, who on entering an inn found a fight going on between several strangers whom he had never set eyes on before. "Is this a proivate foight," he asked, "or may I have a hand in it?" There was a spirit in large sections of the people that desired more colour in life than was given by compromise and thought an agreement a very tame method of settling a difference. George Wyndham had a passion

for talk, and he would often sit up into the morning hours, discussing a wide variety of subjects and pursuing them with an eager enthusiasm that was typical of the youthfulness of his nature; he gave me the impression more than once that he was thoroughly bored with politics, but he was certainly very far from being bored with life. "To go back to the House with its dust and dullness is like a bad dream," he wrote on one occasion; and again, in a letter to his father: "I dislike politics more and more; in politics it is impossible to do more than one thing at a time."

It suited him better to write a verse, hunt a fox and sit talking with his friends into the early hours, and he was one of those rare people who rise from their beds to watch the dawn. His days were crowded with physical and mental energies. The vowel-sounds and rhythms of Shakespeare's sonnets, the song of Roland, the water supply of the prehistoric men of the downs, the fortifications of Maiden Castle, or the result of the latest manœuvres on Salisbury plain, were all subjects which fell within the range of his talk; this interest in a multitude of problems of literature, soldiering or archæology was not detached but always eager and pursuing, as though the quarry lay a short way in front of the hunter.

As a speaker he had a gift of rare value, the power of winning over a hostile audience:—at one of his meetings an extreme opponent was heard to remark: "By go! but he is a gentleman—and never said nowt again t'other side neither."

He was charged with being an amateur: in a specialised age poets were apt to regard him as a politician and politicians as a poet. It has been well said that he was

an amateur in the original sense—the sense that he loved what he pursued, and in the chase of it he was always urgent and pressing ahead.

G. K. Chesterton, who was one of his friends, has said that what gave him a genius for friendship was 'that life had left in him so much of himself; so much of his youth; so much even of his childhood.' He has also related that George Wyndham had 'a huge sympathy' with gypsies and tramps and collected 'many men of letters (including myself) who looked rather like tramps.'[1] I met Chesterton, many years later, but he had no resemblance to any tramp that I had ever seen; if any of his kind could now be found ranging the lanes of England, they would certainly be full of searchers. It was not difficult to see that he possessed himself that very spirit of youth and childhood that appealed to him in George Wyndham. There were boys and girls in the house and Chesterton spent a large part of his time in devising a treasure-hunt for their amusement; the treasure was a work of his own creation and the clues which led to it were contained in verses which he composed for the occasion. One morning he went off in a motor—as secretly as he could—to a town in the vale near by, but his departure was not entirely hidden; he returned from his mysterious errand laden with a number of packages which held the materials of his art, and for some hours afterwards he was privately engaged in his room. The treasure was a portrait of a public character, for whom Chesterton had never shewn any marked enthusiasm; it was dismembered for the purpose of the hunt; legs, arms, and body were concealed in different parts of the house and

[1] See G. K. Chesterton's *Autobiography*.

the garden, and it was only when the last clue was guessed that its identity could be established by the shocking discovery of the head. He gave to his task the grave concentration of an artist and the result was a success that I have never seen equalled in a game of this kind.

The treasure was a large picture more than three feet in height, but he also spent some part of his time drawing very small pictures on scraps of paper. He shewed a spacious courtesy to the young, and when a little girl entered the room he would rise from his frail-looking chair, with some inconvenience to himself and with as much ceremony as though she had been a matron of sixty.

He was attracted not only by George Wyndham's youthfulness but also by his sense of the colour of life, and by his picturesque Toryism which seemed to go back behind the roots of the Reformation. 'My first impressions,' he writes, 'of the falsity of the party system came to me, while I was still a Liberal journalist, in the realisation of how much I agreed with Wyndham and how much Wyndham disagreed with Cecil.'[1] There was a magnificence of proportion and contour in Chesterton's figure to which full justice had rarely been done in the portraits that I had seen; but when he was present in a room, in spite of his great physique, one was conscious far more of his spirit, a knightly twinkling personality full of play and humour, presiding above, near the summit of the mountain, slashing now and then with the cutting edge of his weapon at an ignoble thing in the darkness, and casting a ray of many colours on the world around.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 64. He refers to Lord Hugh.

Chesterton—perhaps by the force of contrast—reminds me of the quietly impressive figure of Thomas Hardy, whom I had the good fortune to meet in later years. My glimpses of him were few and fleeting, but the one I remember best was when my wife and I went a walk with him from his home in Dorsetshire to the banks of a mysterious stream, which he told me had the habit of vanishing underground during certain months in the year. We were accompanied on our walk by 'Wessex', his large shaggy dog, whose real shape was almost completely hidden by the wild luxuriance of his coat. Wessex—like other dogs in this—had a habit of running on in front and turning round now and then to look at his master through his fringe of tousled hair with an expression of wistful inquiry, and in one of his poems Hardy put the dog's question into words:

> 'Yet a dubious ray
> At times informs his steadfast eye,
> Just for a trice, as though to say:
> "Will these things, after all, go by?"'

He spoke much about Lawrence of Arabia, who was stationed not far away and had lately paid him a visit. Lawrence had clearly made a deep impression on Hardy's mind by the story of his experiences and, not least, by his description of the terrible treatment he had received as a prisoner in the hands of the Turks. When the question was raised as to whether any living author would be known in five hundred years, Hardy's answer was swift and terse: 'Someone whose name we have never heard.'

In the list, which was found among my father's papers, of those whom it was proposed to 'approach' if a creation of peers were required in order to carry

the Parliament Bill, are many distinguished names—Admirals, Generals, Principals of Universities, heirs to peerages and authors of note; the approach to these men was never needed, and it was never made; but the curious searcher who turns the pages of the list will find embedded in a strangely various stratum, like a nugget of gold or a rough uncut gem, the name of Thomas Hardy. Those who admire his powerful detachment and the darkling sweep of his mind, will be grateful to Providence that he was not diverted from the work of a poet to that of a politician—even for the space of a week. Passages in his life shew that, though he was impressed by Gladstone, his general view of politicians was not a high one: after attending a political gathering in the 'eighties he spoke of 'the intensely average conversation on politics held there by average men who two or three weeks later were members of the Cabinet.' 'History,' he writes in the same passage, 'is rather a stream than a tree. There is nothing organic in its shape, nothing systematic in its development. It flows on like a thunderstorm-rill by a road side; now a straw turns it this way, now a tiny barrier of sand that.'[1]

Of 'tiny barriers'—in a literal sense—there were many instances in the time that was now approaching and one of them was the bright spear-point of England that held the road to Calais in 1914.

3

During the last three years of peace my father was often faced simultaneously by more than one serious crisis, as though waves coming from different directions

[1] *Early Life of Thomas Hardy* by Florence Emily Hardy, p. 225.

were curving to break at the same moment. In July 1911 when the Parliament Bill was approaching its last phase, the *Panther*, a German gunboat, appeared off Agadir on the coast of Morocco; the nominal cause of the visit was 'local unrest,' but the real object was to influence the French attitude towards German claims in Africa and to test how much the friendship of England was worth. The challenge was accepted in a speech made by Mr. Lloyd George to the bankers of London: he said that if a situation were to be forced upon us in which peace could only be preserved 'by allowing Britain to be treated, when her interests were vitally affected, as though she were of no importance in the Cabinet of nations, peace at that price would be a humiliation intolerable for a great country like ours to endure.' The effect of the speech was greatly increased by the fact that Mr. Lloyd George was known to be the leader of the most pacific group in the Cabinet and after a period of dangerous tension the Germans retired from their position.

At home there was a series of strikes—among them the Great Coal Strike—and these were accompanied by the controversies over Mr. Lloyd George's Insurance Bill and the agitations of the militant suffragettes. In 1911 Italy went to war with Turkey over Tripoli; in 1912 the Balkans burst into flame and the Balkan League declared war against the Turks. With this sombre background in foreign affairs the Home Rule Bill at Westminster began its fateful march towards the statute-book.

In introducing the Bill my father pointed out that there were between twenty and thirty self-governing legislatures under the Crown, who reconciled local autonomy with Imperial unity. 'Are we going to

break up the Empire,' he asked, 'by adding one more? The claim comes this time not from remote outlying quarters, but from a people close to our own doors, associated with us by every tie of kindred, of interest, of social and industrial intercourse, who have borne and are bearing their share, and a noble share it has been, in the building up and the holding together of the greatest Empire in history. That claim falls no longer on deaf ears. There has been reserved for this Parliament, this House of Commons, the double honour of reconciling Ireland and emancipating itself.'[1]

On the question of Home Rule political feeling rose to such a pitch of passion that it began to invade social relations among our elders. Mrs. Dugdale has related that on one occasion Sir Edward Carson banged Mr. Balfour's luncheon table 'till the glasses rang' and declared that social relations with Home Rulers had become impossible. 'Balfour,' she adds, 'did not dissent, but said in a tone of extreme depression that he had never expected to have to admit that such a thing could be true in this country.'[2] But it is much to be doubted whether he followed Carson's austere precept either in gesture or principle.

I witnessed a curious scene of a different kind one summer evening when my father, contrary to his usual custom, went to a dance. It was a large ballroom and the youthful couples revolving in the waltz did not seem much concerned with the political frictions of their elders. When my father appeared there was a faint stir in a corner of the room; an elderly lady of determined countenance suddenly rose from her place; there was a look of horror in her eyes as though the

[1] House of Commons, April 11th, 1912. [2] *Arthur James Balfour*, p. 104.

Devil himself had suddenly appeared on the threshold, and with one backward glance of outrage she marshalled two reluctant girls out of the further door. I felt sorry for the girls, but the Devil did not seem the least disturbed; he had many friends at the dance; with a slight shrug of his shoulders he still stood in the doorway, surveying the scene with a rosy smile of faintly sardonic benevolence.

During the years before the War I now and then made political speeches and had some private discussions with my father on questions at issue: one of these talks was about the Reform of the House of Lords, and there were several on the subject of Home Rule. I had an idea—shared by others of my own generation—that the Upper House might in the end develop into a kind of Imperial Senate and include representatives from the Dominions. But that end was not yet; for the transport of members such a scheme seemed to depend on the improvement of flying, then in its infancy, and it depended also on Hardy's 'thunderstorm-rill,' the strange, haphazard course of English history. My subject was not so remote as this; I asked my father how he thought the elective Second Chamber contemplated by the Parliament Bill ought to be composed. He answered in a very practical tone that it was hard to find any agreement: "Every crank in the country," he said, "has a plan of his own, and few of them agree with one another."

In 1914, when the situation in Ireland was reaching a climax, I sometimes discussed it with Aubrey Herbert, who was then Unionist M.P. for Yeovil. Aubrey was in touch with some of the moderate opinion in his own party and his imaginative mind was singularly free from

the coils of prejudice that had for so many years resisted the patience of statesmen. In the past many people in England, who were remote from realism, had taken far too light a view of Carson's army in Ulster, but Aubrey had always been of a very different opinion, which had been shared by myself. The habit of drilling is contagious; if an army forms on one side of a frontier, it usually begets another army on the opposing side; and this effect, now so familiar in Europe, was happening then in Ireland, where the Volunteers in the South were increasing in numbers every day. Early in 1914 the situation already had a very sinister aspect, and whatever the private views of the leaders, there was a danger that the gathering forces behind them would press them forward to some act of rashness that might result in a conflict.[1] Aubrey, though he was profoundly repelled by the idea of Civil War, told me that, if trouble came, he thought that several of his moderate friends might be drawn into it on the side of Ulster, and that he might find himself in the same position. It was one of the few adventures that did not appeal to his nature.

After the trouble in the Curragh, which happened in March, my father, in addition to his other duties, took over the War Office, and a month later events in Ireland moved to a crisis: on the night of the 24th of April the *Mountjoy*, a ship scarcely less famous than the *Panther*, arrived at Larne and landed 25,000 rifles and 3,000,000 cartridges for the use of the Ulster Volunteers.

My father had often been charged with being too

[1] During later negotiations my father writes: "Carson is quite anxious to settle, but makes much—honestly I am sure—of his difficulties with his own friends." *Memories and Reflections*, II, 3.

optimistic, but a strain of optimism was needed in anyone who attempted the task of solving this age-long problem. He had always been opposed to taking criminal proceedings against Carson and his friends and in his view it was of vital importance that the new State should be born 'under the star of Peace.' Apart from this, he thought that no Irish jury would convict them, and, if they were convicted, they would be enthroned as martyrs. This opinion was strongly supported by the Nationalist leaders.[1] He was much attracted by Aubrey's personality, and I had already told him of the view held by Aubrey and his friends of the moderate party. But the situation now had suffered a violent change. Soon after the gun-running I had a short talk with my father and he told me some of the details of what had happened at Larne; it was obvious that he took a very serious view of the siuation and we know now that the Cabinet during these days was considering proceedings against the ringleaders.

With Ulster in arms, it did not seem at all probable that the Nationalist Volunteers would be content to remain without them; this could be safely predicted, but it was impossible to say where these things would lead in the end. When I discussed the question with Aubrey, I found he agreed that the very extremity of the situation gave some ground for hope, as it was likely to strengthen the current of opinion that was flowing in the direction of conciliation. Most imperialists, Liberal or Conservative, saw a great and growing danger in this inflammation so near the heart of the Empire, whilst the narrow partisan, however close his blinkers, could scarcely fail to see that if Ulster in arms embarrassed

[1] See *Fifty Years of Parliament*, II, pp. 139–142.

the Liberals, Ireland in arms might prove an even greater embarrassment to the Conservatives.

During the next few days a more restrained temper began to make itself felt: in Parliament the Unionist leaders adopted a tone of conciliation, the tension in the air relaxed and my father was able to report to the King that 'in view of the better political atmosphere' the Cabinet doubted the wisdom of instituting proceedings. A dangerous corner had been rounded, and there seemed less risk of an outbreak. Early in May my father told me that he was going to see Carson and Bonar Law and he still seemed hopeful that he would succeed at last in reaching a formula to which both Carson and Redmond could agree. The difficulty of solving the problem was further complicated by an element in the Conservative party which had been so incensed by the Parliament Bill that it was opposed to any kind of settlement.

In my father's negotiations during the summer, the main issue was the definition of the part of Ulster, which was to be excluded from the Bill. The Unionists wanted 'a clean cut' for the four Protestant counties and also Tyrone and Fermanagh; the Nationalists wanted Fermanagh and half Tyrone, where the mixture of race and religion presented a complex problem.

During this summer I now and then played tennis with Arthur Balfour whom I met at Stanway. At tennis he was intent on the game and at other times the subjects of his talk were usually very remote from politics; I only remember one occasion when the wretched question of the disputed counties entered into it. I asked him whether he thought no compromise could be arrived at, when there was such a narrow gap

to bridge and the price of failure was the prospect of Civil War. It was natural that he should not commit himself, but he shewed no sign of hope, and he seemed more inclined to discuss the cause of the trouble than any possible means for its remedy. His biographer has related that in Irish policy he was 'always an extremist'. Eight years later he was a Minister in the Government which made the Treaty of 1922 with the Irish Free State, though when the Treaty was negotiated and signed he was absent in Washington.

The negotiations during May, June and July 1914 present an extraordinary instance of the intractability of an Irish problem, when the leaders represent parties whose passions are running high. To bridge the narrow difference that kept them apart the most powerful influences were brought to bear: on my father's suggestion the final stage of the negotiations was held in Buckingham Palace; the Speaker was Chairman and the King sent a most eloquent letter speaking of the danger of Civil War and urging those who took part in the Conference to be 'patient, earnest, and conciliatory'; but the most powerful appeals, the forces of wisdom, the influence of moderation, were of no avail whatever to bridge this tiny span: when a deadlock was reached, the Speaker made a very fair suggestion that the two disputed counties should be included in the North or the South, and should after an interval decide by plebiscite to which part they wished to belong, but this proposal was rejected by both parties to the dispute.[1] It was as though the flood of moderate feeling, which was now running strong in England, had been turned aside by something less than a straw.

[1] See *A Speaker's Commentaries* by Lord Ullswater.

A few days after the breakdown of the conference the eyes of Englishmen were suddenly turned away from the bitter and musty coil of this Irish quarrel. They had been gazing westward at a fire of smouldering thorn, but now, looking to the East, they saw that the frontiers of Europe had burst into flame. The disciplined challenge of Ulster, the invective of agitators, the shrill cries of the militant suffragettes were drowned in the thunder of cannon. Controversies were postponed; Irish leaders of the North and South offered their support in the War and in face of a foreign danger England sprang together; enemies became friends and the harshest divisions were healed as though leaders and people had been touched by a magic wand.

Chapter XII

A POET IN REVOLT

I

In 1913 I met D. H. Lawrence, a poet living on a plane far removed from the dust of politics, but more deeply in revolt against the values of the age than any political leader. In the summer of that year Lawrence and his wife came to Kingsgate near Broadstairs where I had taken a small house near the sea for my wife and her boy. The Lawrences dined with us several times, and we went for walks with them on the sand beneath the chalk cliffs of the bay.

The essence of Lawrence's nature was poetry and it was impossible to be with him for more than five minutes without being struck by the passionate vividness of his perceptions and by the power of expression which seemed to well out of him with a free, natural flow as though it were coming fresh from a spring. His diction both in speech and writing was often interspersed with slang; he was a free coiner of new phrases and sometimes of new words.

He had a broad forehead, jutting forward a little near the arc of his brow, and during his later years a short tawny beard: his eyes were clear, sensitive, and widely set; his figure was slender and rather frail, with

a light natural grace, swift and sometimes sudden in movement. There was a quality in him which seemed closely akin to the sights and voices of Nature and he sometimes called to mind the idea of a faun, receptive and alert to every sound of the fields and woods; there was something sprite-like, electric, elemental, in the spirit which moved in this slight sensitive form and in the aura which seemed to hang about it. Being in essence a poet and one of a very direct nature, his theory of art was strongly opposed to the 'would be' of self-conscious effort; his impressions were urgent and immediate; his theory was one of inspiration, and he seemed to work under the direction of a possessing force without always knowing on what path his work was moving or at what goal it would end.

'I am doing a novel,' he writes in a letter, 'a novel which I have never grasped. Damn its eyes, there I am at p. 175 and I've no notion what it's about. I hate it. F. says it is good. But it's like a novel in a foreign language I don't know very well.'[1] For this inspiration, though he did not himself always understand to what results it was tending, he had great reverence: if a work seemed unsatisfactory, sooner than trimming its fringes or entering on long petty labours of minute corrections, he would wait for the mood to come on him again and rewrite the whole manuscript. The result of this method, though it sometimes produced defects of form, was a freshness whose bloom may sometimes be brushed away by too much finish.

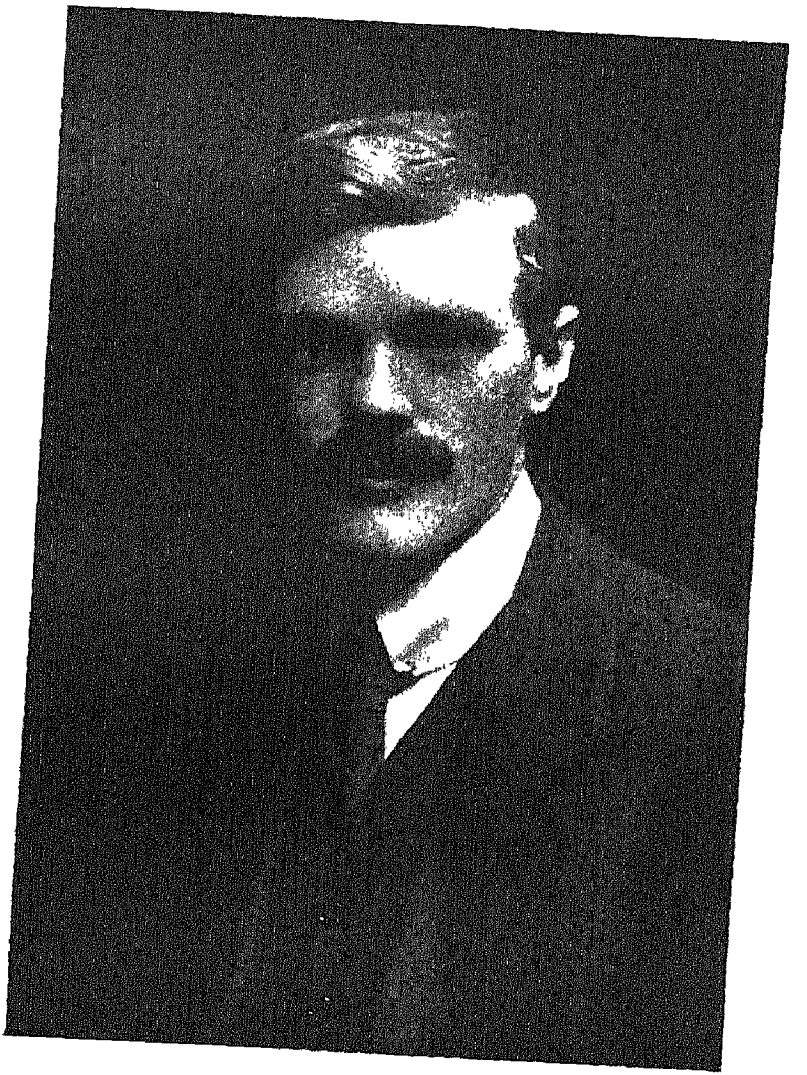
He looked with passionate honesty at the essence of his message and the style in which he delivered it was

[1] This and other quotations in this chapter will be found in *Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, edited by Aldous Huxley.

often deliberately colloquial; his emphasis was laid on the spirit rather than the form, and now and then he would throw down a conscious challenge to those who set the highest value on the vesture of a thought.

For Lawrence creative writing was almost a religious exercise: 'I often think,' he writes, 'one ought to be able to pray before one works—and then leave it to the Lord. Isn't it hard work to come to real grips with one's imagination—throw everything overboard. I always feel as though I stood naked for the fire of Almighty God to go through me—and it's rather an awful feeling. One has to be so terribly religious to be an artist. I often think of my dear Saint Lawrence on his gridiron, when he said, "Turn me over, brothers, I am done enough on this side."' And again, in another letter: 'I am a passionately religious man and my novels must be written from the depth of my religious experience. That I must keep to, because I can only work like that. . . . You should see the religious, earnest, suffering man in me first, and then the flippant or common things after.'

His first and essential quality was his poetic power which shews itself in his prose as well as his verse; in his novels, his short stories and some of his letters this power can be constantly felt, as though it were just below the surface, and in all of them it often wells up uncontrollably to express itself with startling beauty in a strange medium: 'Give me Bavarian highlands,' he writes in a letter, 'when the sun shines, and the pine woods are dark, with glittering flakes, and suddenly the naked, red-skinned limb of a pine tree throws itself into the heat out of the shadow, and deer go trotting through the sun-dapplings: where in the upland



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meadows the autumn crocuses stand slim, a great many each standing single, in the intense green of the cut grass, lovely slender mauve-pink things, balancing their gold in the centre while a butterfly comes and goes; where the chicory bushes glimmer so blue, they seem to tremble with sources of light beside the pond, as the white ducks go in a row: and where, far off, the golden-coloured mountain tops look out of heaven over the shoulders of the dim-radiant ranges in front.'

In *Sons and Lovers*, *The Woman who Rode Away*, *The Man who Died* and many of his other works in the prose form, including in their number the condemned *Rainbow*, there are hundreds of passages suffused with such a strange fiery light and shot with such penetrating flashes that prose, the medium in which circumstances so often forced him to work, seems to be brought to the very verge of poetry. He wrote of his life as 'a free flame floating on oil—wavering and leaping and snapping', and this quality of flame, this swift flickering radiance, is often found in his writing: the form of his work was not of the static type, it was not carved with the cutting edge of a classic chisel nor was this his intention; the form was fluid, and pulsing and tensely alive; he was charged with licences and irregularities of style, but is not a free flame, 'wavering and leaping and snapping', open to the same indictment?

He was very far from putting a low value on the classics: on the contrary he spoke to me more than once of his great admiration for Aeschylus; he admired the *Bacchae* of Euripides for its 'flashing poetry', and considered the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles to be 'the finest drama of all times'. He felt, however, that his

free flame could not be artificially confined in an ancient form, but must weave its own patterns, moving without restraint at its own will. He regarded poetry as 'his dearest treasure' and in a very significant letter to Mr. Edward Marsh he describes his theory of the emotional pattern in verse: 'I think more of a bird with broad wings flying and lapsing through the air, than anything, when I think of metre. . . . It all depends on the *pause*—the natural pause, the natural *lingering* of the voice according to the feeling—it is the hidden emotional pattern that makes poetry, not the obvious form'. And again, in the same letter: 'This is the constant war, I reckon, between new expressions and the habituated, mechanical transmitters and receivers of the human constitution. I can't tell you what *pattern* I see in any poetry, save one complete thing. But surely you don't class poetry among the decorative or conventional arts. I always wonder if the Greeks and Romans really did scan, or if scansion wasn't a thing invented afterwards by the schoolmaster.'

He hated the idea of the substance of verse being poured into a static mould; his 'free flame' found its natural expression in a certain freedom of form and it is not easy to imagine him cutting his lines into 'satin lengths' or imitating the measured couplets of Pope. But in freedom of metre he cannot be looked on as an extremist: though he made experiments, and adventured as a pioneer into strange planes and a new country, where his nature led him, many of his most beautiful poems—such as *The Bride*, *A Pang of Reminiscence*, *A White Blossom*, and several others—are not marked by licence.

In many passages Lawrence shews his belief in a

mystic inspiration: as compared with this power he looked on the intellect with great distrust and at times with violent distaste: in his view the intellect often hampers the free flow of life and love by a tedious array of cramping restraints: 'Life and Love are life and love, a bunch of violets is a bunch of violets and to drag in the idea of a point is to ruin everything. Live and let live, love and let love, flower and fade, and follow the natural curve which flows on, pointless.' And again in another passage of his letters: 'My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says, is always true. The intellect is only a bit and a bridle. What do I care about knowledge. All I want is to answer to my blood, direct, without fribbling intervention of mind or moral, or what-not.'

This point of view which is emphasised in many passages in his novels and stories was often violently assailed by his critics: Lawrence was charged with being 'sub-human', and was suspected of making a return to the gods of Africa and the uncanny demons of the jungle. Mr. Aldous Huxley in his excellent preface to Lawrence's letters, describes him as 'a kind of mystical materialist'. From another angle he might even be regarded as an idealist in a special and individual sense, for the blood which he speaks of as capable of feeling and belief, a source of life and love and inspiration, cannot be looked on as 'matter' in the crude, conventional sense, a mere blind congregation of atoms. It is not the mind which has been made akin to the blood, but the blood which has been made akin to the mind: to use a phrase from Donne, it is as though

the 'body thought'. Like the early ascetics, he laid great emphasis on 'the flesh', though for very different reasons: for them it was an instrument used by the Devil in order to undermine the higher activities of the spirit, but for Lawrence it was a herald of the divine message, a sacred thing.

In a sense he might be regarded as an extreme instance of the reaction against the complacent formalism and the element of hypocrisy which had been one of the worst defects in Victorian character. But his acutely individual genius was not the child of any 'movement', though its expression was much influenced by the strange mutations of his life, first, as a boy in a mining village, next as a school teacher, and then as a poet, a prophet, a wanderer, continually searching the shores of the world for that small ideal community on which he had set his heart.

2

After their visit to Kingsgate I met Lawrence and his wife at my own house in London, at their flat in Byron Villas in the Vale of Health at Hampstead, and at Littlehampton; and after the War, when a large part of his life was spent abroad, he often came to see us when he was on a visit to England. He was a brilliant talker, vivid, direct, unexpected, with a queer sardonic humour that was entirely his own.

He was once invited to the studio of a famous artist, who was painting the portrait of a lady; he entered with his wide-brimmed hat in his hand and after surveying the pictures on the walls and the portrait, which was still unfinished, he suddenly broke into utterance: "Mortuus est! Mortuus est! Let the

dead paint their dead!" He continued this grim refrain, repeating it several times, as he paced up and down the studio. This was a strange form of encouragement to offer to a brother artist; and in fact few people could have thought that either the painter, or the subject of his portrait, was 'dead' in any serious sense: on the contrary each of them was endowed in a high degree with the forces of vitality, but their outlook on life was not that of Lawrence.

His condemnations of other authors were often severe, but in his talk they were marked by a queer sprightly gaiety, a sardonic playfulness which did something to lighten their effect. His gift for metaphor often added a devastating effect to his criticisms: many instances of this power may be found in his letters, especially when his subject is Dostoievsky, an author for whom he had a definite dislike. 'I don't like Dostoievsky,' he writes. 'He is again like the rat, slithering along in hate, in the shadows, and, in order to belong to the light, professing love, all love. But his nose is sharp with hate, his running is shadowy and rat-like, he is a will fixed and gripped like a trap. He is not nice.'

He was deeply shocked by Casanova, whose works he read while he was writing *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. One of the ironies of Lawrence's life was that a large number of those who read his works were led to do so by motives which would have disgusted their author, who hated the half-veiled form of salacity, and pursued what he believed to be true with fearless candour and with something of the intensity of religious emotion.

He sometimes gave me the impression of being endowed with a strange perceptive sense of his own,

which made it possible for him to probe into elements in a hidden world lying beyond the range of others. Like many men of high sensitivity he often had moments of sudden tension and of these I remember one rather curious instance. One evening after tea he was walking up and down a sitting-room in my house, when he suddenly halted and fixed his gaze on a French table that stood against the wall. It was a harmless little table in the style of Louis XV. If the ordinary man had cast an eye on it, it is not probable that he would have thought it worthy of notice, nor is it in the least likely that it would have roused in him the smallest spark of emotion. It was probably of later date than the period to which it pretended, but I do not think it was this fact which drew Lawrence's attention: for Lawrence it was an instance of the 'would be', the conscious rationalising element which he disliked, and its rather trivial elegance seemed to gain emphasis and even a certain self-consciousness beneath the baleful light of his cold accusing gaze.

His aversion to this table was not altogether a joke: he walked up and down inveighing against the furniture of life, with which he thought the modern world was far too much occupied; in his view it cared too much for material objects, too little for the essence of human relationships; and it is easy to imagine that a table of Louis XV, carrying with it the scent of another civilisation, would have been as much out of place in that ideal society of which he dreamt, as in the garden of the Hesperides.

He was an able and dexterous worker with his hands, and Mr. Aldous Huxley relates that 'he could cook, he could sew, he could darn a stocking and milk a cow, he

was an efficient wood-cutter and a good hand at embroidery, fires always burned when he had laid them, and a floor, after Lawrence had scrubbed it, was thoroughly clean.' Of his darning and his milking I cannot speak from direct experience, but of his powers of cooking I can: when he had rooms at Byron Villas, in the Vale of Health, I enjoyed a dish of scrambled eggs which he had cooked himself and it shewed strong evidence of his skill and delicacy in a very practical sphere.

Lawrence's presence had a singular personal charm, simple, direct, and curiously disarming in his moments of vital gaiety: when he entered a room one was immediately conscious of his strange attractiveness and it gained emphasis from the fact that his personality was so entirely different from that of anyone else. It is not possible to forget his swift sensitive response to the spirit of life, a contagious habit which seemed to spread to others who were in his company, though no one I ever knew possessed the same mysterious powers. He loved or hated sights and sounds through which many men pass daily with dull ears and blinkered eyes, and he could draw from life more joy, and bitterness as well, in a few hours, than most others could take in a week. His presence was very frequently that of a benign being, and it did not often suggest that he was a visitant from the dark hidden gods of his imagination.

His sardonic gaiety was allied with an element of humility and he often shewed diffidence about his own work, but he sometimes spoke as though the fire from some presiding spirit were blowing through him whether he willed it or not. At moments there was somethng almost saintly in his appearance and he felt with certainty

that he had a message to deliver; his power of vision was as sensitive as his power of utterance and he could see heaven in the tint of a sheet of sand or the poise of a wag-tail on a gate-post.

The Great War was in a special sense disastrous for Lawrence. His philosophy was in essence subjective; but during the War the harsh, jagged angles of the objective world could not be escaped, and their constant impact on every side reduced him to misery. When I was on leave, I met him several times, and of his outlook during that period something will be said in a later place.

Chapter XIII

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

I

During the fortnight before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, I saw my father several times during brief intervals in the stress of his work. I also met Lord Haldane fairly often during this time, as I was secretary to a Treasury Committee, over which he presided, for inquiring into certain questions connected with Courts-martial in the Fleet and the Army. Most of the witnesses who came before us were high officers of both Services, but the day soon came when admirals and generals were no longer able to attend.

Asquith's clarity of thought, his powerful sense of proportion, his cool, unflurried control, had never been more needed than now; these qualities shew themselves in the contemporary notes which he wrote from day to day during the rapid changes in the international situation. During the last week of peace there were vague but well-founded rumours of a division of opinion in the Cabinet. I remember one day during this week when he came into the dining-room at Downing Street very late for lunch after one of many critical meetings with his colleagues; although war had not yet broken out, the atmosphere was already heavily charged with

tension; at the table beneath the picture of Pitt was a varied company of widely different ages, the War generation and several men in later life; my father came in through the large door at the end of the room and walked sturdily to his place at the table, a strange physical contrast to the slim, surveying figure of Pitt, except for his orator's lips and the expression of gravity which seemed to lurk in his eyes. As he entered the room, there was a sudden silence: it was a time when people were already beginning to lift the veils of their reserve, and most of the company stopped their conversation as though it had been cut by a knife, looking at their host with curious expressions of scrutiny as though they were trying to read from his face what was the issue of the momentous discussions from which he had come—on what path things were moving.

Though in that electric air the others shewed their feelings, my father did not lift the curtain of his reserve and few except those who knew him best, could have guessed how deeply he was moved: a few tentative questions were asked, and though he said nothing that could commit himself or anyone else, there was something in his manner, a calm resolution mingled with a certain detachment which made one feel that he was looking with a clear and balanced mind on a world that shewed many signs of insanity, and that he believed that he could achieve his purpose of meeting the danger with a united front.

Sir Edward Grey was often with him during these days and I remember one evening when they were both sitting after dinner in the room upstairs—my father in his chair at the writing table—when Sir William Tyrrell, who had just crossed the street from the Foreign Office,

entered the room and standing beside the table, told him the latest news in the presence of those who sat around: such was the charged and urgent air of the crisis that the presence of that small company did not seem to matter, and the little collection of toy figures herded beneath the rampart of red despatch boxes on my father's desk, added a strange touch to the scene, infinitely remote from the gigantic issues that lay in the hands of their owner.

Another frequent visitor to Downing Street during that critical week was Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, an inspiriting presence; he had long been abused by his enemies, and I once heard Birrell compare him to 'St. Sebastian, transfixed by many arrows'; but if he had wounds, he seemed to endure them with gaiety: his invincible energy and his imaginative boldness of action made a strong appeal to the younger generation, and he seemed to take naturally to the new fiery air which was now being blown into the lungs of Europe.

When the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were murdered at Serajevo on the 28th of June, the murder roused horror and disgust in every quarter of the globe. But it was some time before it was realised by the public that a lever had been suddenly pressed over in the vast structure of checks and balances which preserved the peace of Europe, and that once that lever was pulled, the machinery of war would go relentlessly to work.

During the next five weeks events moved so swiftly that the opinions of the average man could scarcely keep pace with their changes. If during the early days of July any Englishman had been asked whether he would

be willing to give up his profession, leave his island, his wife and his family, and go abroad as a soldier to fight for Servia, the country where the murder had been committed, it is probable that he would have regarded the question as too ridiculous to deserve an answer. To most onlookers it seemed at first unthinkable that retribution for the death of two innocent people should be sought in the death of many millions as innocent as themselves. Such a consequence as this seemed absurd, blankly impossible, incompatible with the sanity of statesmen.

Though the sky was baleful, and from day to day the gloom was gathering, many people told themselves that some compromise would surely be found; they averted their eyes and extruded from their minds the thought of anything so appalling as a general war; but while Grey was striving to smoothe the path to peace, sinister influences, hostile and imponderable, seemed to be moving behind the veils of diplomacy; and towards the end—in the beginning of August—there was a sense also of the tramp of some malign destiny marching forward to disaster. It was only during the last few days of this period that onlookers began to realise that this tragedy which they had regarded as impossible, was really coming to pass.

Up to the end there were serious differences of opinion on the question of intervention not only in the country and in the House of Commons, but in the Cabinet itself; and during these weeks of suspense Asquith bore a weight of responsibility as great, or greater than had ever been borne before by an English statesman. He had a triple task, first, that of mediation, secondly, the choice of peace or war for England, and

thirdly the duty of presenting a united front to the enemy.

By a stroke of good fortune his own thoughts and impressions during this period are recorded from day to day in his *Contemporary Notes*,[1] which are in many ways typical of their author, displaying, as they do, his sense of proportion, his conciseness of thought and diction, and his strongly practical outlook.

On the 24th of July, when Austria had sent her ultimatum to Servia, he observes that Russia will 'almost inevitably' come on the scene in defence of Servia, and that 'we are within measurable distance of a real Armageddon'.

On the evening of the 29th he went across to Grey and sat with him and Haldane till 1 a.m., talking over the situation and trying to discover 'bridges and outlets'. He relates that one of the ironies of the case was that we, 'being the only Power that has made so much as a constructive suggestion in the direction of peace, are blamed by both Russia and Germany for causing the outbreak of war'.

On the 30th the City, which was 'in a terrible state of depression and paralysis', was for the time being opposed to English intervention.

On the 31st Grey told him of a painful interview he had had with Cambon, the French Ambassador, who was pressing strongly for a reassuring declaration. Grey replied that our actions must depend upon the course of events, including the Belgian question and the direction of public opinion in England.

It was suggested, after the event, that Grey might have prevented war by a firm declaration that England

[1] *Memories and Reflections*, II, 5–9.

would support France if Germany attacked her. Those who make this criticism, are apt to forget the acute division of opinion at that time among the public, in Parliament, and also in the Cabinet, and the rapid change of view that took place during the events of the next few days. But even if it had been possible for Grey to make such a declaration, it is highly improbable that it would have moved the German General Staff to alter their plan of operations; they hoped at that time to conquer France long before England could put great armies in the field or make her full weight felt on the continent.

On the 1st of August the crisis became even graver than before: a dramatic incident happened that can best be told in my father's words: 'Sir William Tyrrell arrived with a long message from Berlin to the effect that the German Ambassador's efforts for peace had been suddenly arrested and frustrated by the Tsar's decree for a complete Russian mobilization. We all set to work, Tyrrell, Bongie,[1] Drummond and myself, to draft a direct personal appeal from the King to the Tsar. When we had settled it, I called a taxi, and, in company with Tyrrell, drove to Buckingham Palace at about 1.30 a.m. The King was hauled out of his bed, and one of my strangest experiences was sitting with him, clad in a dressing-gown, while I read the message and the proposed answer.'

At this point in the crisis Mr. Lloyd George was for keeping the position still open, whilst Grey declared that if a policy of non-intervention at all costs were adopted, he would go, and Mr. Winston Churchill demanded immediate mobilisation. My father records

[1] Sir Maurice Bonham Carter, then my father's private secretary.

that if Grey went, he would go as well, ' and the whole thing would break up '.

On the 2nd of August, when Germany was already at war with Russia and France, and had violated the neutrality of Luxembourg, my father had a distressing interview with Prince Lichnowsky, the German Ambassador, who implored him not to side with France. The Cabinet were now on the brink of a split. After a discussion of three hours they agreed with difficulty that our fleet should not allow the German fleet to make the Channel a base of hostile operations. There was a strong party in the Cabinet against intervention in any event: John Burns resigned; and Bonar Law wrote to my father that the Opposition would back up any measure for the support of France and Russia.

In a note made this day Asquith defines his own position in a few terse words:

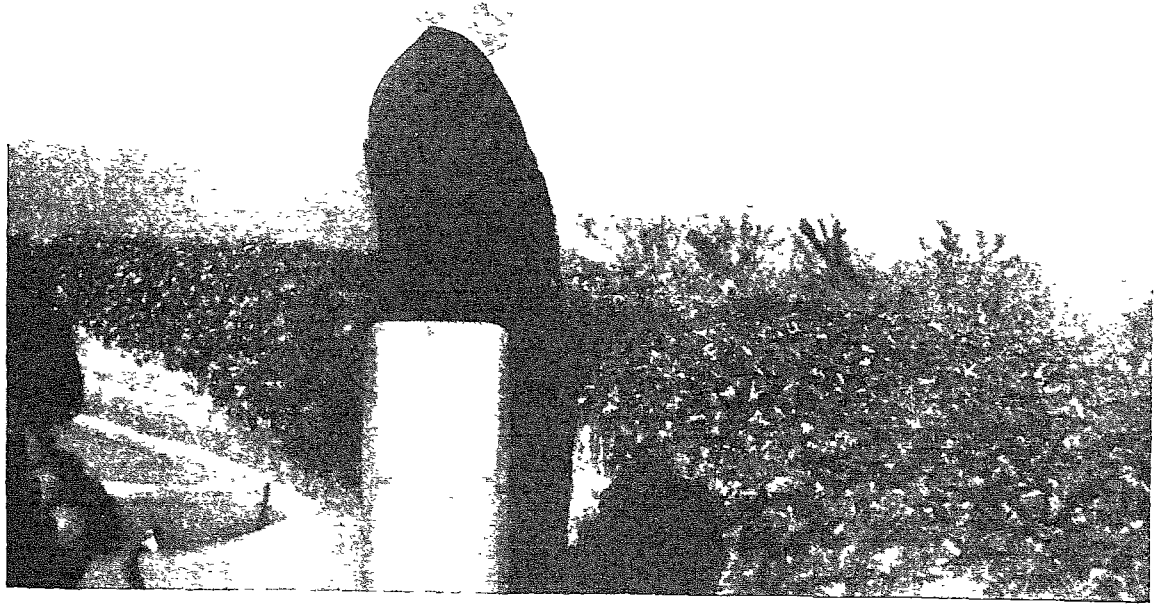
' Happily I am quite clear in my mind as to what is right and wrong. (1) We have no obligation of any kind either to France or Russia to give them military or naval help. (2) The dispatch of the Expeditionary Force to help France at this moment is out of the question and would serve no object. (3) We must not forget the ties created by our long-standing and intimate friendship with France. (4) It is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power. (5) We cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base. (6) We have obligations to Belgium to prevent it being utilized and absorbed by Germany.'

Things were now coming rapidly to an issue. On the 3rd of August there were three more resignations

from the Cabinet: John Morley, Sir John Simon and Lord Beauchamp followed the example of John Burns. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne came to see my father early in the morning and laid stress on Belgian neutrality. In his note on this day my father records the German ultimatum to Belgium and the appeal of the Belgian king to King George. He then describes Grey's famous speech in the House of Commons: 'Grey made a most remarkable speech almost an hour long, for the most part almost conversational in tone and with some of his usual ragged ends, but extraordinarily well reasoned and tactful and really cogent, so much so that our extreme peace-lovers were for the moment reduced to silence, though they will soon find their tongues again.'

On the 4th of August he writes: 'We had an interesting Cabinet, as we got the news that the Germans had entered Belgium and had announced that if necessary they would push their way through by force of arms. This simplifies matters. So we sent the Germans an ultimatum to expire at midnight requesting them to give a like assurance with the French that they would respect Belgian neutrality. They have invented a story that the French were meditating an invasion of Belgium and that they were only acting in self-defence, a manifest and transparent lie. Winston, who has got on all his war-paint, is longing for a sea-fight in the early hours of the morning to result in the sinking of the *Goeben*. The whole thing fills me with sadness.'

That evening my father waited with Grey, his colleagues, and Sir William Tyrrell in the Cabinet room: they were waiting for the unlikely event of a



H. H. A. AT WALMER CASTLE, 1914

message from Germany, in answer to their ultimatum; but they did not expect it to come.[1]

Midnight in Berlin was eleven o'clock by English time: the last minutes of peace ticked away; the clock struck the hour: the war order was flashed from the Admiralty to the Fleet and the news travelled far and wide to British ships on the seas of the world.

2

A few weeks after the outbreak of war I went with my brothers, Arthur and Cyril, to a course of training at the Public Schools' camp at Tidworth on Salisbury Plain. Lord Kitchener had lately issued an appeal for the first hundred thousand recruits for his new armies, and before I left for Tidworth I had an interesting conversation with my father on the question as to how long it would take to train them as soldiers. He said that he was told by military experts that it took at least a year to convert a civilian into an infantry soldier, but a more serious problem than this was the provision of artillery and other technical arms. In these early days many regular soldiers, for this and other reasons, were very sceptical about the future value of Kitchener's army as a fighting force, and some of them, in a curiously optimistic mood, expressed the view that the War would be over before the new armies were fit to be put in the field.

Men who had spent the greater part of their lives in learning the profession of soldiering were reluctant to

[1] One who was waiting in the next room in connection with the measures for war emergency, has kindly informed me that the whole Cabinet were present, Mr. Churchill being the last to arrive.

believe that this art could be also acquired by civilians in a short period of intensive training. But though this was the view of many, it was luckily not the view of all: there were others who bore in mind the obvious precedent of the American Civil War, where the main forces, like the new armies of England, had been devoid of training and equipment when the war began.[1]

In ability, physique, and education most of the men who were now joining the colours far exceeded the standard of the average recruit of peaceful years; nor could it be left out of account that in the matter of training a few months of active service are worth more than any number of peace-time manœuvres, in which cartridges are blank, casualties unknown, and the effects of attack and defence are learnt by theory and not by experience. Many of those who thought in the early days that the new armies would not be trained in time took a much shorter view than Lord Kitchener of the period which the War would last; their inward hopes inclined them to distrust an estimate that was at once bold and honest; it seems probable, too, that they underestimated the value of training in the field and failed to realise that in a single week of modern battle a battery would often fire more shells than in all its peace-time existence. Such intensive practice in shooting had never before been given to soldiers.

The tents of the camp at Tidworth were pitched in a most attractive position on high ground among the foot-hills of the downs and it was crowded almost beyond its capacity by men who, like ourselves, had suddenly left their professions to learn their new duties.

[1] An enlightening account of the effect of training by active service is given by General Henderson in his *Life of Stonewall Jackson.*

The tents were full, and we slept with our feet congregated round the pole and our heads near the canvas, like the spokes in a wheel. We were all supplied with uniforms, rifles, and bayonets, but owing to the sudden inrush of men there were inevitably certain deficiencies with which the authorities had found it impossible to cope on the spur of the moment. Though we were provided with rifles, there was a shortage of knives and spoons, and in the large central mess tent it was a new and queer sensation eating hot mutton in one's fingers, stirring tea with a pencil, or trying to learn the strangely elusive art of buttering bread with a fork.

We were given lectures on map-reading, tactics, and the practical use of the compass: most of our lessons were based on *Field Service Regulations*, and other manuals which gave excellent advice to the soldier on the subject of open war-fare, but the battle which they envisaged was one of movement rather than siege, a battle of musketry rather than of trench mortars, hand-grenades and fifteen-inch howitzers. Machine guns were rare in those days, and a large proportion of the small supply that was available, was required for use at the front; but during our manœuvres on the downs we were now and then joined by a machine gun section from a neighbouring depot, and listened curiously to the 'toc-toc' of its business-like, ominous chatter which was later to become such a familiar accompaniment of our lives.

One day a General came to inspect us, and Lord Kitchener himself paid a visit to the first recruits of his new army, who were lodged in huts a few miles away. We often met these men on the roads, marching in long serpentine columns of fours; they were without arms

or equipment, still in their civilian clothes, wearing every variety of hat and coming from every walk in life, whistling and singing between the summer hedgerows the tunes of ' Tipperary ', ' Slogging over Africa ', or with a queer irony of their own :

> ' Send the boys or the girls' brigade !
> They are always free ;
> Send my sister and send my brother,
> But for God's sake don't send me ! '

Most of us enjoyed our manœuvres which ended in a bloodless charge carried out against an imaginary enemy beneath the brisk, glinting eye of the General who had come to inspect us ; but the scene I remember best was a march over the rolling slopes and ridges of the Wiltshire downs in the dusk of a moonless night when that long singing column of youth moved, rank on rank, passing over the hill like a company of shadows ; as they marched at ease, their lighted cigarettes looked like a train of fire-flies moving through the darkness, and so, singing and smoking, but scarcely visible themselves, they crossed the upland turf beneath rollers of midnight cloud and the sparse, glittering lights of the September stars.

3

After leaving the camp at Tidworth I went for a further period of training to the depot at the Crystal Palace, and then to a course at Portsmouth where I was given a commission in a brigade of the Royal Marine Artillery which was expecting orders to go to the front as soon as it was supplied with its guns. In September I went to see Aubrey Herbert who was now in London,

recovering from a wound which he had received in the retreat from Mons. He had been acting as intelligence officer in the Irish Guards and was wounded and captured during their rearguard action in the forest of Compiègne.

Aubrey was at this time M.P. for Yeovil; though a Yeoman he was not a regular soldier, but in spite of the weakness of his eyes he had succeeded in becoming attached to a battalion. He landed in France on the 13th of August and the German hospital, where he was lying, was recaptured in the early part of September. His adventures in the course of this single month were extraordinary in their number, their rapidity, and their curiously dramatic end; in war, as in peace, they had come to him, not uninvited, and this was very far from being the last of them.

I found Aubrey lying in bed; his wound was nearly healed and he gave me the first account I had heard of the battle of Mons from one who had himself taken part in it. He said that his regiment advanced through a field of turnips beneath several coveys of partridges which had just been put up by the fire of the German field-guns. During the retreat he was riding a horse called 'Moonshine' and he acted as a galloper during the rearguard engagement in the woods of Compiègne on the 1st of September. While he was galloping to fulfil an order of his Colonel, he was hit by a bullet which had already struck a tree and came into his side broken up. His wound was dressed, and he was captured soon afterwards, while he was lying on a stretcher on the ground.

He has given an account of this incident which throws some light on the chivalry of the Germans: "I lost consciousness for a bit; then I heard

my regiment charging. There were loud cries and little spurts of spasmodic shooting; then everything was quiet and a deep peace fell upon the wood. It was very dreamlike . . . The glades became resonant with loud, raucous German commands and occasional cries from wounded men. After about an hour and a half, I suppose, a German with a red beard, with the sun shining on his helmet and bayonet, came up looking like an angel of death. He walked round from behind, and put his serrated bayonet on the empty stretcher by me, so close that it all but touched me. The stretcher broke and his bayonet poked me. I inquired in broken but polite German what he proposed to do next; after reading the English papers and seeing the way he was handling his bayonet, it seemed to me that there was going to be another atrocity. But the German was extremely kind and polite. He put something under my head; offered me wine, water and cigarettes. He said: 'Wir sind Kamaraden'. Another soldier came up and said: 'Why didn't you stay in England—you who made war upon the Boers?' I said: 'We obeyed orders, just as you do; as for the Boers, they were our enemies and are now our friends, and it is not your business to insult wounded men.' My first friend then cursed him heartily, and he moved on."[1]

The Germans at this time hoped that they were pressing on to another Sedan; for this purpose, as their huge right wing swung round, speed was everything; on this the whole future seemed to hang. While Aubrey lay on his stretcher, they passed him in crowds, giving him 'a tremendous impression of lightness and iron'. As they swerved in curiously to look at a British

[1] *Mons, Anzac and Kut* by Aubrey Herbert, p. 72 *seq.*

officer, he heard the words: 'Schnell Kinder!' and again they moved on. When it grew dark, he felt cold: one of the Germans, seeing this, covered him with a coat, and then, stripping a dead German and a dead Englishman, gave him a German jersey and an Englishman's coat to wear.

He was taken with several other wounded officers belonging to his regiment to a house at Viviers which had been converted into a hospital, and here he was well treated. When he had been in hospital for little more than a week there were signs that the French advance guard was approaching the town: it was coming from the victory of the Marne, of which, so far, he had heard nothing.

That day was one of excitement for the British wounded: there was heavy rain and through the rain they heard the rattle of rifle fire, always drawing closer. The final scene is given in his own words, scrawled in his diary at the time:

"3.10 *p.m.* The French are here. They came in in fine style, like conquerors; one man first, riding, his hand on his hip. The German sentries who had been posted to protect us wounded walked down and surrendered their bayonets. The German doctors came to us for help. I offered to go, but W. went. The French infantry and cavalry came streaming through. Our wounded went out into the pouring rain to cheer them. They got water from our men whose hands they kissed. The German guns are on the skyline. The Germans are in full retreat, and said to be cut off by the English." This was the start of the long northward race of the armies, which ended at last at Ypres and at Nieuport, on the coast of Flanders.

4

In October I saw Rupert Brooke who had just returned with my brother Arthur from the expedition to Antwerp carried out by the newly formed battalions of the Naval Division. On their return they were given a few days' leave and came with some brother officers to lunch with my father at Downing Street.

Their experience, in a different way, had been almost as strange as that of Aubrey Herbert. Rupert Brooke and Arthur, then both platoon commanders in the Anson battalion, told me that they had been doing a course of musketry and when the training of their men was far from complete, they were suddenly roused from sleep at 5 a.m. on Sunday the 4th of October and were given orders to march to Dover and then to embark for Dunkirk. They had understood that at Dunkirk they would have another month of training; but when they landed, they were told that they were going into action at Antwerp and that on the way their train would probably be attacked by the enemy.

The troops were not provided with field dressings, but my brother with some difficulty succeeded in procuring them before he entrained his men. They took over the trenches at Antwerp on Wednesday before dawn and found in front of them 50 yards of barbed wire entanglements and flat fields 'full of piebald cows.' My brother describes a curious incident in his diary:

"Refugees still swarming in with cows and cart-loads of belongings, by the two roads to our front. *Redoute* 13 fired unexpectedly, and knocked the bicycle

from under one of four civilian cyclists on one of these roads. We rang up, and asked why they had fired. They replied that it was a new Krupp gun, and they had only fired this as a trial shot."

The battalion spent two days under fire and got orders to retire at 6.45 p.m. on Thursday evening. It was a sombre retirement, a night's march back towards the sea through miles of deserted suburbs, and then along roads which were crowded with refugees with white drawn faces, old men and women struggling along with dog-carts and hand-carts which bore their belongings, Belgian troops, and the motor omnibuses of the naval transport which, according to Rupert Brooke, still announced on their notice boards that they 'were bound for Hammersmith, and might be allowed to see *Potash and Perlmutter.*' My brother described the scene in his diary: "We found ourselves on a road with marshes and canals to our left, and the petroleum tanks on our right. These seemed to cover an area of about a kilometre square, and all were ablaze except about four abutting our road. These four were licked by flames, and one wondered whether they would explode while we were marching past them. Happily what slight breeze there was came from our left. Two Yankee flags fluttered absurdly on buildings near the tanks. Beyond the tanks was a field with grass, trees, and many ditches. On this, a sort of forest fire was blazing and roaring: flames running along the surface of the ditches, so I suppose they were full of oil. Crowds of huddling refugees, and a railway blocked with three toppled locomotives, farmcarts and débris of ruined houses—all in the glare of the conflagration—formed a weird and wonderful spectacle never-to-be-forgotten."

My brother said that this was a most critical point in the retirement, as the line of march lay very near to the tanks and an explosion on a large scale seemed probable at any moment. While they were crossing the river by a pontoon bridge, a German spy was caught by some of the men trying to blow up the bridge; a bullet grazed his forehead and he was wounded with a bayonet, and my brother heard later that he had been shot. After marching for thirteen hours under appalling conditions they entrained for Bruges, and on the morning of Saturday arrangements were made to get 1500 salted footbaths for the men; but before the men could enjoy them orders came to entrain for Ostend.

Sir Edward Marsh relates that Rupert's five war-sonnets, which he called his 'camp-children', were finished during his leave at Christmas, and he wrote to a friend shortly afterwards that his muse, 'panting all autumn under halberd and cuirass, could but falter these syllables through her visor'; but it may well be that after his return from Antwerp they were already growing in his mind.

As he sat in the room at Downing Street beneath the eyes of Pitt, side by side with the statesmen of a later generation, wearing his weathered tunic fresh from the line, he was a figure impossible to forget: he had a strange lyrical amusement glowing in his eyes, his face was still lit up by the excitement of action, and he looked like some child of the sun, the spirit of Youth itself, who had suddenly descended through the murky smoke-banks of London.

Chapter XIV

FLANDERS IN 1915

I

Many of the officers in my brigade expected that we should go to the front in the winter of 1914, but we had to wait for the delivery of our guns; they arrived at the end of February, and a few days later we embarked for Flanders. A large number of the officers and men, and most of the N.C.O.'s, were regular soldiers, belonging to the Marines; to these were added a number of recruits, like myself, who were being trained in gunnery, and were hoping to make up for their deficiencies by experience of active service. At Portsmouth we lived in a barracks which had a musketry range and a spacious square in which we held our drills and parades: we were also given lectures on tactics, practice with the revolver and courses of musketry and the machine gun.

In the examination at the end of the machine gun course one of the tests was to ask a young officer to report whether the gun was ready for action, and I was warned by a brother subaltern that one of our examiners, in order to enliven the proceedings, had a humorous but disconcerting habit of slipping his pencil-case into the barrel when his victim was looking in another direction.

When my turn came, I looked in vain for the pencil-case, but I succeeded in passing the test.

We left for Dover in the beginning of March a few days after our guns had been delivered: we were armed with Maxims and heavy machine guns, two-pounder pom-poms, equipped with a new and secret device which we were told was a British invention. Our equipment was an early experiment in mechanical warfare: we had no horses; our transport was composed of motor lorries and we were also supplied with motor bicycles for despatch-riders and a number of armoured cars in which our pom-poms could be mounted. Though the War had not ended before Christmas, it was still a time of optimism: it was said that the Higher Command had hopes of breaking the line in the spring or early summer and there would soon be a resumption of moving warfare, in which our mobility might come into play. When we reached Dover, I went with Knight, another subaltern in my battery, to superintend the loading of the ship, a Channel packet which lay alongside the pier not far from the Lord Warden Hotel. Lorries, guns and armoured cars were swung aloft among the wheeling gulls, revolved beneath the giant finger of the crane, hung for a moment poised against the clouds, and were lowered with precision into the opening of the hold. The process of loading looked as simple as though the ship were being neatly packed with a collection of children's toys.

Owing to the presence of enemy submarines on our course for Dunkirk our embarkation was postponed till the next evening. As we stole out on a dark night past the boom of the harbour, I saw a very young

subaltern standing beside me near the rail of the deck; he seemed to be deeply depressed, and shewed me the photograph of a girl: 'That's my friend,' he said. 'Most of you had somebody to see you off, but mine wasn't there: her people wouldn't let her come.' Such was 'business as usual'—even in the early months of 1915, and I do not remember a more dismal example of this detestable doctrine.

We arrived at Dunkirk before dawn after following a long zig-zag course for many hours in order to avoid the submarines. Several cruisers, destroyers, and torpedo-boats lay in the harbour, and one of the first things I saw on the shore beyond it was the ugly bulb of a naval mine, which had broken from its anchor and lay wallowing on its side in the glint of the ripples that lapped the stretch of the sand. We had a very good reception from the inhabitants who looked curiously at our guns: except for the hospital nurses almost all the women were dressed in the deepest mourning, and it seemed that even in those early months there was scarcely one of them who had not already lost a relative.

A few days after our arrival, while we were waiting for orders, I was walking with the Colonel near our billets, when we suddenly heard the deep thudding grunt of a heavy explosion: at the same moment a house in a neighbouring road was smashed into splinters; chimney-pots and broken beams soared high into the air and with them something that looked like the fragment of a dining-room table rose to an enormous height and descended sublimely into the next street. Above the ruin hung the black mushroom cloud of the explosion, fringed on every side with a dense reddish mist of brickdust from the pulverised walls, drifting slowly

downward and glistening in the sunlight. We searched the sky for an aeroplane, but there was not one in sight and a few minutes later there was another explosion, this time in some public gardens.

The Colonel, who was a great authority on explosives, contemplated the scene for a few moments with cool technical interest: 'Come along,' he said in his low calm voice: 'We'll have a look at this.'

We passed between some shrubberies and came out into a wide space of open grass, near the centre of which was a huge gaping hole, with a layer of earth, finely powdered by the force of the explosion, spreading out over the grass on every side of its jagged edges. The crater was about 20 feet across and it was still reeking with the acrid smell of high explosive; we clambered down the side of it and searched the blackened loam at the bottom for some fragment of the mysterious missile that had fallen there; the Colonel, who had bent his agile wiry figure and was thrusting about in the loam with his stick, suddenly picked up a strip of copper and began to examine it: he glanced up with a glint of humorous surprise. 'It's not a bomb after all,' he said. 'It's a shell.' The strip of copper was part of the driving-band of a projectile on which the rifling of the gun had clearly left its mark, still hot with the explosion. During the same day many other shells fell on the town: it was one of the first long-range bombardments of the War and was carried out by a German gun firing from Belgium, at a range of more than twenty miles.

After a few days our brigade was ordered to go into the line and its guns were distributed at various points between Ypres and Nieuport Bains, where the Western trench-line ended at last on the shore of the sea.

I was ordered to join the section near Nieuport, where my battery commander, Captain Barr, had chosen a position for two of our guns behind a railway embankment a few hundred yards from the front line of trenches. Some way behind them, skilfully hidden in the ruins of a farm, was a battery of French 75's and behind these were some heavy British guns, a naval six-inch and a 9·2. These naval guns had been brought up by night to positions far nearer to the trenches than was usual for heavy artillery. We directed our own fire at low-flying aeroplanes crossing the trenches, at the German communication trench, and at the streets of a ruined village that lay behind their line.

During the first few weeks, though we were their close neighbours, we seldom saw a living German: but day and night we were often made conscious of the presence of that other army, hidden beneath the ground, whose trenches were in many places only a few yards away from our own.

I went up to our position for the first time with Captain Barr, the charming and genial spirit who commanded my battery, walking by night along the straight desolate road that led to the line. In front of us and far away to the right the course of the line was shewn for many miles by a long wavering crescent of pallid watery lights, the flares and starshells of the trenches, ceaselessly rising and falling with a strange restless persistency and fading away in far perspective across the flats of Flanders, past the floods of Dixmude and down to the marshes of Ypres, until each separate light was lost and they were all merged together in a faint luminous mist on the brink of the southern horizon. Near Dixmude a flight of rockets with long fiery tails

rose into the sky and burst at a great height into constellations of golden stars that drifted slowly downward and faded into dull red sparks as they fell. These rockets were signals from the German infantry to their guns to fire the S O S and repel some local raid; a few moments later we heard the distant thudding and booming of their guns, and nearer, the answering fire of our own, and in a few minutes the trouble seemed to spread on either side as though the line were becoming inflamed. But these sounds soon died away, and in front of us all was quiet except for the sullen grunting explosions of bombs from a German trench mortar, and, now and then, the sound of a bullet, whining past us in the darkness, or burying itself with a plunk in the bole of a shattered tree.

We spent the night near our guns in a little dugout in the railway embankment near the reserve line of trenches, and I was woken in the early hours of the morning by the grunt of a German trench-mortar bomb which shook the roof and walls of our cubby-hole, covering our blankets with flakes of loam which fell from the low earthy ceiling. Soon after dawn I went forward with Knight, one of my brother subalterns, to look for observation posts. Before going into the fire-trench we climbed the broken tower of a church which gave us an excellent view of No Man's Land, and beyond it of the German trenches and the ruined village of Lombartzyde that lay behind them.

Nieuport was one of the main bastions of the Western line, for here on the coast were the carefully guarded flanks of both armies. The German line met the shore on the sandhills, and its extreme northern flank, the end of everything, was held by a strongly fortified position

called 'the Grand Dune'; from here a broad entanglement of German barbed wire, its rusty network supported by a forest of iron posts, stretched down over the sands where a few months before the citizens of Ghent and Bruges had taken their wives and children for their holidays by the sea.

Not far away were the entanglements of the Allies and between the two was a strange sandy No Man's Land, where the children had built their castles and where now the incoming tides advanced, lapping their way through the rusted iron stakes, and tangling the wire with strands of sea-weed. On the shore behind was a rank of bathing-machines that had long ago lost the gay complacency with which they had primly presided over the sands of a summer watering-place; torn by shells and riddled with bullets, letting the light of day through their gaping wounds, they were a queer memorial to the old life that had so lately passed away.

A few months before this place had been a Margate in miniature, with its tented cabins on the beach, its cinemas and tea-houses, its trivial and rather tawdry red-brick villas with Swiss gables and fretwork balconies and elaborate roofs perched rather self-consciously among the sand-dunes. It was now very different from what it had lately been, very different too from what it was soon to become; but this early stage of destruction, when the signs of recent habitation were still to be seen, gave a sharper feeling of irony than that later phase when towns and villages had been so pounded with shells that walls and roofs became little more than heaps of rubble, and when the existence of a village could only be learnt, as in the case of Hooge,

by a lonely notice-board whose inscription was riddled with shrapnel. So a body, lately dead, makes a deeper impression on the mind than a few scattered bones from an ancient skeleton.

There were several gaps in the staircase of the churchtower where shells had hit it, and some of the stonework, owing to the shattering of its supports, had crashed down into the crypt, but it was not a difficult climb; there was a huge jagged hole in the belfry, and we looked down through our glasses at No Man's Land, which lay a few hundred yards in front of us, and at the parapet of the German front line.

It was rumoured that the putting green of a golf links had once formed a part of No Man's Land, but now it was far beyond recognition: the ground was scattered with large numbers of the dead, French and German, lying on that powdered and shell-pitted soil, on their faces or their backs, tangled on the barbs of the rusted wire, or tossed over the brink of a shell-hole, and here and there a rigid arm stretched upwards aimlessly to the sky. But in the long line of the German fire-trench and the torn streets and shattered houses of the village behind it, there was no living German to be seen, no sign of the mysterious enemy who had disturbed our night with his machine guns and trench mortars, though at that moment there must have been many hundreds in the cellars of the village and many thousands hidden behind the parapet of the trench.

On either side of us stretched the canal of the Yser blocked by waterlogged barges, lying beneath the oily surface or wallowing on their sides with gaping rifts in their splintered timbers; and near it was the railway,

where a train which may often have carried the family parties of Flanders to their summer holidays, lay on its side, like a broken toy, twisted and bent, the engine with black jagged rents in its boiler, a shattered piston, and driving-wheels lifted in the air.

We were both thrilled by examining this curious and sinister view, which came to us now, at the first glance, as a strange adventure, fresh, even in its monotony of shell-pitted land, and we spent some time examining the lie of the country and the position of the German trenches in order to make our report to Captain Barr. In that flat country with its dunes rising above the shore the churchtower was an ideal post for observation; there was a great concentration of guns behind us, guarding this bastion of the line, and at first it seemed a strange thing that the tower contained no observers except ourselves. But we were not left long in doubt as to the reason: we had not been there more than a few minutes, when we realised that it was being used as a ranging-point for the German artillery. A shell from a heavy German gun came towards us with a curious metallic roar, that reminded me of the sound of an express engine racing through a tunnel; it burst in the graveyard a few yards from the wall of the church, and after the explosion we heard the whirr of splinters that buzzed through the air, wailing and keening, as they passed away into the distance. Other shells followed, bracketing the tower and bursting on either side of it, and as we clambered down the shattered stairway in the din of repeated explosions, we were not long in understanding why it was not a popular resort.

We visited this church again now and then in order

to discover the position of German field batteries which had been harassing our guns. Under daily bombardment its shape was rapidly changing and on every visit it bore new scars; the gap in the wall widened, and a day came when the floor of the belfry fell down into the crypt; it was not a place to linger, and in later days we always approached it with respect.

In the end we chose an observation post on the North bank of the Yser; not far in front was an advanced sap occupied by French marines, part of the mixed force who were holding this sector of the line. These marines were fine, swarthy, fierce looking men, tanned brown with the weather, and much taller than the average French infantry soldier. When we entered their sap, they were very hospitable; the sergeant gripped our hands and even showed a tendency to embrace us, before he realised that we held the exalted rank of second lieutenants; he seemed to be under the impression that we were the advance guard of a large British army which had just landed on the coast. He told me that the German trench was only twenty paces away from us, that the post was commanded by German snipers and that no one here could put up his head and live; while he was talking, his men were firing continuously through narrow loopholes in some steel-plating that was wedged between the sandbags of the parapet. Their target was the German communication trench; there were only four or five loopholes, and when one man had emptied his magazine, his place was taken by another who stood beside him. I looked through an empty loophole and saw the German parapet; behind its tangle of wire it seemed absurdly close, not much further than the length of a cricket-pitch, and

grenades were often thrown from one trench into the other.

2

During the months of spring and early summer we were in action at Nieuport and now and then at Dixmude in the sector north of Ypres. Events that had seemed adventures in a first experience, during these months of trench warfare soon began to lose their freshness and became almost a matter of routine. The main feature of the War at these places was a duel of artillery and the chief events of each day were the two bombardments called the 'morning and evening hate.'

Each day was very like that which had gone before it, with a growing list of casualties among men and guns and a gradual attrition of the forces on either side.

The monotony of siege war was varied now and then by curious incidents. One day when Knight and I were on duty with the guns near Nieuport, I heard a voice wishing me 'good morning' and looking round I saw a Roman Catholic priest, a fine upright figure over six feet in height, standing a few yards away from me. I offered him a cigarette; while he was smoking it, he shewed a great interest in our guns, went nearer to examine them, and asked some questions about their mechanism, to which we gave him non-committal replies, for part of it was a secret which was not revealed even to the Church. There was nothing unusual in seeing a priest in the line, nor was there anything very surprising in the questions he asked, though one of them at least shewed that he had some knowledge of gunnery. It was not what he said, but something hard to define in his manner, his carriage, the atmosphere of

his presence, which roused in me a faint tinge of suspicion and as he glanced at the guns, there was a look in his eye, a slightly professional glint, which did not seem altogether in harmony with his vocation.

In those days 'spy mania' was a common disease both at home and abroad: it was a pervasive ailment which often chose as its target the most innocent victims, and for this reason I felt inclined to discount my suspicions, but when our guest had said goodbye, I found that they were shared by Knight: as the priest made his way back from the line, Knight looked at him through his field glasses: "There's something damned queer about that fellow," he said. The priest skirted the brinks of the shell-holes, stopping for a few minutes near the garden of a ruined farm where the muzzles of the 75's peered out cunningly from riotous beds of potatoes and cabbages, and then he passed on over the shell-pitted flats; as he strode on in his solitude, a tall well-knit figure, there was something in his walk and in his bearing that reminded me of a soldier more than a cleric. We reported this incident to Barr, and we did not think much of it at the time; but we were reminded of it a few weeks later, when it was reported that a German officer had been arrested behind our lines in the disguise of a priest, and though our strange wandering guest had promised to return, and we waited long for another visit, he never came back to us again.

Another curious story was circulating at this time: in one part of our front it had been noticed that the Germans had developed a remarkable faculty for discovering the positions of our batteries; these strange intuitions often resulted in very accurate shooting, and

did not seem to depend on observation by aeroplanes. It was also noticed that a most attractive girl was in the habit of going out for long and solitary walks from a village behind the lines. Her solitude, though it might seem strange in peace, however great her charm, was not likely to cause much surprise in war, when men were scarce, and had little time for indulging their admirations except in rare and scattered intervals. But such lonely wandering habits, however natural, are not likely to go unnoticed near the lines of an army, and the time came when another fact was discovered which was far more perplexing than her habits of girlish solitude: it was observed that when she set out on her walks, she was plump and rounded, but when she returned, by some miraculous reduction, her figure had become slim, graceful, and willowy.

This lightning change may well have interested her admirers, and the time came when she was followed. When she reached a lonely spot, which was well hidden from view, the mystery was suddenly revealed: it was discovered that she was pigeon-breasted in the most literal sense of the word: she stopped in her walk, opened her blouse and released from its folds two fluttering birds which flew away over the German lines. Such was the story as it reached us: we were told that the girl had been put under arrest by our allies, and that there had been a difference of opinion as to whether she should be shot or imprisoned, but we never heard of her fate.

Near Dixmude, as at Nieuport, most of the farms were shattered by gunfire, but there was one farm-house which stood in a conspicuous position and for some mysterious reason was still untouched by shells.

On either side and far behind it were the ruins of barns and steadings, and most of the poplars on the roads were shorn, splintered and beheaded; where ruin had become normal, this solitary farm standing alone among its budding trees, without a scar on its tiled roof, was delightful to the eye and might have come straight from the landscape of some Flemish master; in these strange surroundings, by the extremity of contrast, it seemed to be an island belonging to another world. The effect was queer and uncanny: it was as though a fine picture had been neatly framed in a vast dustheap, surrounded by shattered pottery, broken bricks, and old sardine tins.

If the ruins around it had been the work of God, it seemed arguable that this house was the dwelling of one just man, the Noah of the modern world; but being the work of man, the rumour swiftly spread that it was the home of a spy. This solution, however, was far from convincing, and it was felt by most of us that such tender care for the domestic peace of one of their servants was in no way typical of the German Higher Command. We were told that a prisoner, who was captured at this time, had been asked why the Germans had not fired on the farm. 'Why should we?' he answered with a smile. 'That farm is reserved for our headquarters when we come through the line.'

These were the days just before the German attack at the second battle of Ypres and the prisoner's answer may well have contained an element of truth. In war one should not destroy too much: this lesson was learnt in later battles by the British army, when more than once the heaviness of their own bombardment

reduced the soil in front of them to bog and crater-field and put obstacles in the way of their own advance.

3

After a month in the line we came out for a few days' rest in billets at Dunkirk. Knight and I had our first baths for several weeks in the cubicles of a public bathing establishment, a delightful experience which was disturbed at the end by the sudden entry of a plump and benevolent female attendant, who offered to help us in our washing by scrubbing us with an enormous brush covered with short stubby bristles, an invitation which neither of us had the enterprise to accept. We messed in an aerodrome which was occupied by the R.N.A.S., and they took up some of our officers as observers to look for submarines. It was very interesting to approach the line from the direction of the sea and look down at it from a new angle, as it lay below, scarring the face of the country, with its suture of trenches, like a long crescent wound, curving away from the Grand Dune past Nieuport and Pervyse and Dixmude until it was lost in the dun banks of mist and smoke that brooded over Ypres.

As we skirted the coast in an aeroplane, this bird's eye view seemed strangely remote, more like a map than a real thing, though now and then I could discern on its surface the tiny disturbance of a great explosion or a dark tuft of smoke blotting the fields where some barn or steading had been set on fire. When we drew near to Nieuport, balls of smoke from anti-aircraft shells began to appear in the air beneath us, retaining their shape for a moment, and then slowly dissolving

and trailing away into mist, but none of them came very near. We turned west and then south, flying fairly low and peering down into the wrinkled and flickering surface of the sea, trying to discern and now and then almost imagining the long cigar-shaped shadow for which we were searching, but when a few days later we returned to the line, we had neither of us succeeded in finding it.

When we were still stationed near Dixmude, the sound of the German bombardment at the second battle of Ypres rolled up from the South, filling the sky with the echoes of its low continuous thunder. During the interval since the first battle of Ypres several shops had reopened in the town, but they did not stay open for long, for it was now being bombarded not only by the ordinary heavy artillery, but also by the huge 17-inch howitzers which the Germans had brought into action against it. The inflammation seemed to spread up the line and at Nieuport, where we were ordered to take up our position near the end of the month, the German bombardment increased in intensity.

Captain Barr brought us news of the first gas attack of the War, which the Germans had launched at Ypres with yellowish clouds of chlorine on the 22nd of April. The gas was discharged from cylinders in the front trenches and the Germans were equipped with protective apparatus in order to guard themselves from the effect of their own chemicals. As a result of this attack a gap of 8000 yards in width was made in the line and the enemy claimed to have captured eight French batteries. On the 2nd of May the Germans made another gas attack at Hill 60, and they were shewing such signs of activity that a similar attack at Nieuport

seemed very probable, whenever the wind was favourable; at this time we had no means of protection whatever, and we spent several curiously unpleasant hours at the forward observation post, sniffing at the sea-mist that drifted across No Man's Land in search for the scent of chemicals.

We heard that people at home were working feverishly at the manufacture of gas-masks. The first form of protection which was sent up to our part of the line was a pad treated with chemicals, and so designed that it could be strapped over our noses and mouths, but it afforded no cover for our eyes. This was soon followed by the first gas-mask, a grey flannel bag with eye-holes of talc. This mask was fairly comfortable to wear, unless it was raining, when the chemicals with which it was soaked were apt to run into the eyes of the wearer; and in the later period of the War after the invention of the 'box respirator' the old flannel mask was still used to protect men when they were wounded and unconscious.

During the days that followed we had several casualties: a shell hit our forward observation post, wounded two of our signallers and destroyed our telephone; some of our gunners were also wounded and in one case a very slight wound proved fatal owing to some poison in the soil in which the shell had burst. It was clear that our guns were being used as a target and Barr sent me after nightfall to prepare a new position. The place he had chosen was a small patch of ground near the bank of the Yser, half surrounded by the splintered remains of a brick wall; it was pitted with shell-holes and covered with a shadowy tangle of vegetation, and here and there by the glimmering misty

light of the flares, rising above the trenches, I now and then detected a cabbage or the twisted remains of a currant bush.

At the first view the place looked secluded and on the whole more inviting than many of the gun-positions at Nieuport; so far as I could judge beneath those fitful glances of light, it seemed to be the remains of a garden and I chose two nests for the guns, one near a currant bush and the other behind a sturdy laurel that still survived. But I soon realised why this attractive spot remained without a tenant: we had not been digging long when one of my gunners struck a riding-boot with his spade, and we found that a large number of German cavalry who had fallen in some earlier battle, were lying just beneath the surface of the soil, and the memorials over their shallow grave, as so often happened, had been completely destroyed by gun-fire.

A few days later, on the 23rd of May, we heard of the declaration of war by Italy on Austria. The troops at Nieuport greeted the news by sending up a jubilant display of flares and starshells above the trenches, a beautiful exhibition of fireworks to which the Germans replied by a sudden violent fusillade of rifle-fire which spread along the line for many miles from the sea, and was carried on intermittently far into the night. Owing to this fusillade the track over which our rations came up was almost impossible to use—but this message was so far the best news of the year.

4

At the end of May, when I was on duty at the observation post, I received a sudden and unexpected order to report at G.H.Q., where my father was paying a flying

visit to Sir John French. As I walked back through the gun-positions on the shell-torn track, I overtook a Flemish matron, with a round apple face, and a small boy, who for some obscure reason had chosen this curious piece of country as a place for their morning walk. In one hand she carried a bulging sack which was slung over her shoulder, while with the other she led the boy, who seemed about eight years old, pattering along in his wooden clogs over the roughened and shattered surface, worn and rutted by the wheels of the guns. I had never seen a woman so near to the line before, though on this sector the rules were less strict than in many others.

It was on the whole a quiet morning; the Germans were firing occasional bursts of shrapnel at some guns not far from the road, but she did not seem to realise that these balls of smoke that floated high in the air were any concern of hers or of the child who was pattering at her side. I wished her 'Good morning' and she answered me in Flemish, pointing, as she did so, to the ruins of a farm which lay near the remains of the road, and I gathered, from her gestures rather than her words, that she had once lived there and had just returned to it to recover some of her property which she was now carrying to safety in the sack that was slung over her shoulder. I advised her to hurry her pace, but she appeared perfectly at ease, and her strong sense of property seemed to have dispelled any nervousness she might otherwise have felt either for the child or herself. As to his presence she gave me no explanation, but to take him for a morning walk under the fire of machine guns seemed a queer way of keeping him out of mischief.

When I reached our billets, I was met by a motor-car which had been lent me for the journey by Brigade Headquarters: it was not the kind of car in which Generals ride, but a slight and nimble two-seater, which carried me swiftly across the boundary of France and I arrived at G.H.Q. in St. Omer late in the afternoon. I was given a bedroom which looked out on to the doorway of Sir John French's house, and found it was a strange sensation lying between sheets, though at first it was not very easy to sleep in them. I did not see much of my father that night, as he was dining with the Commander-in-Chief; but the next day we started early in a motor and he paid several visits to commanding officers: he attended a parade of troops, was taken to an aerodrome, visited hospitals, and was conducted over a brewery, which had been converted into a washing-place for the troops; tubs, vats, and cauldrons of many shapes and sizes were occupied by naked soldiers who were splashing themselves with water and washing the mud of Flanders from their limbs, while their clothes were being cleaned and dried.

We had luncheon with Haig who was then in command of the First Army. My father sat next to him and they seemed to get on very well; their faces and heads formed a strange contrast in physiognomy, but to those who knew my father it was clear that he was enjoying himself and deeply interested in his talk. He had great sympathy for soldiers in these difficult days: he liked meeting them and talking over their difficulties in an atmosphere removed from Whitehall, and one result of his visits to France, which, as Haig relates, were conducted 'on business lines', was in many cases to break down that barrier of distrust and misunder-

standing that often separates the soldier from the statesman.

Haig compares Asquith with Mr. Lloyd George in a letter written the next year after each had paid him a visit: "Lloyd George has been with me during the last two days, so I have been able to notice the differences in the two men and to realise how much superior in many ways Mr. Asquith is to L. G. I have got on with the latter very well indeed and he is anxious to help in every way he can. But he seems to me to be so flighty—makes plans and is always changing them and his mind. Most unpunctual (except when coming to meet me I must confess). But he was 1½ hours late at lunch with General Foch . . . On the other hand Mr. Asquith has such a clear and evenly balanced mind."[1]

In spite of many contrasting qualities, there was obviously more in common between Haig and my father than there was between Haig and Mr. Lloyd George; the temperament of the lowlander with its reticence and quiet resolution was more typical of Yorkshire than of Wales. My father had another quality which appealed to Haig and other soldiers—his natural gift, which had been developed by his training at the Bar, for eliciting information by questions and going by the shortest path to the core of a subject; but though he instructed himself on technical matters, he shewed deference to soldiers in their own sphere and was averse to interfering in anything which fell strictly within it. In his view the duty of a Prime Minister was to choose a commander, just as a man after full advice may choose a surgeon; but once chosen, he thought it his duty to support him while he was at his post, and

[1] *Haig* by Duff Cooper, I, 356.

he was not inclined to jog his arm when he was in the act of doing an operation.

At the end of luncheon Haig came across the room and asked me some questions about Nieuport, and I was greatly struck by the charm of his personality. My father shewed an acute and lively interest in everything he was shewn at the aerodrome, and also in a display of trench mortars which he watched firing their bombs at a target in a field behind the lines. When he asked for information, his questions were terse and to the point. To one who has spent his life in politics, it may well be a relief to hear a description of the gadgets of an aeroplane or the working of a mortar, standing to learn the lesson in a French field beneath the flickering shade of the poplars; and this was certainly true of my father, who listened to those around him with the keen, inquiring interest of an older man, hearing the explanation of a new and extraordinary game.

Haig remarked later on Asquith's capacity of recording in a memorandum the results of long conversations, of which he had not taken a note, without a single error in the names of places or technical military detail. Haig has also given his view that 'in brains and all-round knowledge' Asquith was 'head and shoulders above any other politician' who had visited his headquarters.[1] My father was now sixty-two years old, and there was something slightly paternal in his attitude towards the soldiers, but there was no hint of complacency in his manner; he had come, as Haig relates, 'on business', to learn a lesson from his juniors and to absorb anything that could possibly be of use to the general cause; his strong practical mind was well equipped for this task, and

[1] See *Haig* by Duff Cooper, II, 154.

it was clear enough to those who were with him, that he took a genuine enjoyment in devoting his powers to this kind of work.

5

After another night at G.H.Q. I returned to the line at Nieuport and reached it in time for dinner in our mess, which was a dugout of a very primitive kind scooped out of the railway embankment near the Yser canal. The Germans were fond of firing at this embankment; their shells often fell in the canal, blowing up fountains of muddy water and huge baulks of timber soaring skyward from the shattered hulls of the barges, and some of them burst on the railway above, shaking down from our roof flakes of soil and grit that fell into our soup or added a strange earthy flavour to our excellent stews of bully beef. Dinner in this dugout was a curious contrast both in its fare and its surroundings to the luncheon I had had in that distant house among courteous senior officers; it was hard to believe that this meal had taken place only a day before, for it already seemed a remote experience, and the house itself like the cool oasis of a dream.

Barr had moved our guns, but about the middle of June our new position was discovered: a battery of German field guns opened a heavy fire on us, and their aim was accurate; their shells bracketed us very quickly, and some of them burst very close. It was Barr's custom on these occasions to order the men to take cover and the officers to man the guns: he had a gallant and merry spirit and I think he enjoyed firing them himself. As Knight and I were running to man No. 1 gun, a shell burst near me and I was hit in the mouth

by a small splinter. My injury was slight, but it needed attention, and as my leave was nearly due, Barr suggested that I should have it treated in London.

After a few weeks of treatment in England I returned to the front, and on arriving at Nieuport I heard that our guns had again been bombarded and that my friend Knight had been hit, and had died of his wounds.

He was one of many thousands who had already so fallen, scarcely more than a boy in years, but bearing the fullest burden of a man. I had seen little of him at home, and our friendship had been formed, and suddenly ended, in the queer, unearthly conditions of that strangely twisted world, the line in Flanders; within it he stood forth as a splendid example of boyhood tempered beyond its years by stark experience, now and then impetuous, but a first-rate officer, full of care for his men, gay, gallant, and loved by all.

Chapter XV

MEN AND PROBLEMS

I

In 1915 the War had entered on its long second phase: on the Western Front mobility had ceased, and in its place was the war of siege, the drag of prolonged tension, the unceasing exchange of life for life without any great advantage gained by either side. It was clear that small isolated actions, even if they succeeded, might only result in the creation of salients, the holding of which would expose our troops to heavier casualties than they had suffered before, making victory on a narrow front one of the greatest penalties.

A familiar manœuvre of the past had been to turn the flank of the enemy; in this Western battle one of the flanks rested on the neutral frontier of Switzerland, which the Allies had no wish to violate, the other on the coast north of Nieuport; the coastline was heavily protected by great numbers of German batteries of every calibre, and to effect a landing of a large force against these prepared positions was clearly a hazardous operation and one which might well have resulted in disaster. If the War were regarded as a whole, the Eastern flank of the enemy was in Turkey, and at the Dardanelles there had seemed a chance, if not of turning it, at any

rate of splitting it asunder; but here success depended more than ever on the vital principle of surprise, and surprise, unfortunately, had not been achieved.

Most professional soldiers regarded the Western Front as the decisive theatre of war, since this was the line of defence for Paris and the English Channel, and to weaken it would expose the vitals of both the leading Allies, France and the British Empire. In their view success on some distant field would be useless, if the Allies were defeated in the west, and victory in the west would also mean victory on every other front. This argument was strengthened by the fact that the Germans owing to their position in the middle of Europe could transfer their forces from one front to another with far greater rapidity than the Allies. It was as though in a vast game of chess one of the players could only move round the edges of the board, whilst the other could cut across the centre.

It seemed to follow that the main problem was the question as to what were the right strategy and tactics to be adopted on the Western Front. When men considered this riddle, they may well have thought of the little green-coated figure lying at rest on the shore of the Seine, and wondered what he would have done in that first year had he been in command of the Allies. Many a *poilu* in the moment of the assault may well have imagined him riding a ghostly Marengo above the mist of the battle; if the spirit of his genius, called forth by the need of his country, had risen to inspire the Higher Command just before the battle of the Marne, there was little sign of it now, and it seemed that he slept again, weighed down by his tomb of porphyry.

There were some who thought, perhaps with undue

optimism, that had he been alive, as a genius opposed only by talent, Napoleon could have won the War for France at the end of 1915—that he would have done it somehow; but by what strategy, what tactics, who would be rash enough to suggest? Among the many thousands of second lieutenants who during this year, and later, were engaged in the line, and falling daily, there may well have been some to whom Nature had given a genius for high command, but if they existed, there was small chance indeed of their ever reaching a rank in which they would be able to exercise their powers; the new armies of England were not forces in which either the private soldier or the junior officer could be said to carry a baton in his knapsack.

The difficulties of the British generals were obvious and great: apart from the tactical problem of breaking the siege-line against the strength of heavy defences and the fire-power of modern guns, their own armies were not yet large enough for the purpose; they had the double task of fighting the War and at the same time of training new troops with which to do it; they had to forge their weapons before they used them.

Since the days of the Trojan horse, and probably long before it, in the ambuscades of our primitive ancestors, surprise has always been one of the vital principles of battle: in the Great War there were, of course, several instances of its use, such as the first German onset through Belgium, their use of gas at the second battle of Ypres, and in later years the use of tanks by the British; but the essence of surprise is boldness and not experiment, and in the case both of gas and of tanks the effect was greatly reduced by using each in the first instance on far too small a scale, a method

which had the disadvantage of giving away the secret without producing a decisive result.

Various causes made surprise especially difficult on the Western Front: the first was constant observation from enemy aeroplanes; the convenient hill, which in other wars had so often concealed a sudden movement, was no obstacle to observers in the sky. Another cause was the large scale of the operations, which made their preparation difficult to conceal from view; a third difficulty was the preliminary bombardment, which far from concealing an attack, acted instead as a clear advertisement and warning of a battle and of the sector on which it was about to open. Generals were thus in a serious dilemma: if they did not have a preliminary bombardment, there was less chance of overwhelming the batteries and defences of the enemy, and there was a risk of heavy casualties in the attack; if they did bombard, the element of surprise was lost, and the enemy was given time to mass his reserves behind the threatened sector. There were many who held, with good reason, that long preparatory bombardments, extending over many days, were a serious mistake, and that the principle of surprise was far more important than that of over-cautious preparation; but it was a long time before this principle was applied in practice.[1]

The difficulty of breaking the Western Line and the failure to pierce it at the battles of Neuve Chapelle and Festubert in May 1915 led to the agitation for more munitions. This was one of the causes which resulted in the formation by my father of the First Coalition Government; it was a curious irony that the agitation

[1] As late as July 1917 the bombardment before the battle of Passchendaele lasted for 10 days, and the shells fired in it were worth about £22,000,000.

was started by Sir John French who had himself been the military adviser of the Government before the War, and had written to Lord Kitchener before the battle of Festubert that 'the ammunition would be all right'.

In addition to these actions in the west, the failure of the first attack at the Dardanelles had been a great disappointment to public opinion; but the immediate cause which led my father to form the new Government was a letter from Bonar Law who wrote to him that unless 'the constitution of the Government were changed' the Opposition would no longer be able to avoid 'controversial discussion' on the subject of the resignation of Lord Fisher, the first Sea Lord. It was clear that once controversial debates began on the subject of Lord Fisher they would probably also extend to the questions of the Dardanelles and of munitions, matters on which public discussion was a serious danger owing to the risk of giving away vital information to the Germans.

At such a time of national peril a coalition was clearly a better alternative than a resort to argument in face of the enemy. Bonar Law, Balfour, Lansdowne, Curzon and other men of high ability were added to the Cabinet, but there were serious losses. Mr. Churchill who was distinguished by his imaginative grasp of the principles of war, was now given the inferior position of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; and the Unionist leaders insisted that Haldane, to whom England owed so vast a debt as the organiser of her army, was to be rewarded for his great services by being excluded from the new Government.

Haldane had been educated at a German University, he was known to be an admirer of Goethe and Hegel,

and owing to his knowledge of the German language and German mentality he had been entrusted before the War with secret negotiations in Berlin which were concerned with the reduction of armaments in the cause of peace. In August 1914, when war broke out, he was almost immediately chosen by certain newspapers as a target for attack; the persecution was carried on with bitter violence; by this part of the press his work for the Army and the Territorials was completely neglected; it was said that he was a 'pro-German' and the tense emotions of war time were worked up by continuous propaganda, which reached a dangerous pitch of intensity among sections of the public, who had never read a line of Goethe's poetry, or of Hegel's philosophy, and who may well have thought that one was a field-marshal and the other an inventor of poison gas. It was a deadly instance of the speed with which ignorant feeling can be stirred and directed in times of tense excitement.

Soon after the persecution began Haldane went to my father and offered to resign, because he thought that the violence of the attacks on himself might weaken the authority of the Government, but my father had refused to part with him. He was now put in a position which none could envy: to give way to the Unionists meant the sacrifice of his friend to a popular frenzy of a kind which he by nature detested, and was accustomed to resist; but the Unionists were adamant on this question; protest and persuasion were of no avail, and the only alternative seemed to be party controversy in face of the enemy.

Haldane was given the O.M., in normal circumstances the highest of honours, but in these a compensation that



BARRIE, HALDANE AND "BRUCE"
(Taken in recent years.)

could scarcely weigh in the scale. He went off to stay with senior officers in France, many of whom were his personal friends, and knowing well his real services to the army, were not in the least affected by the ignorant rancours at home. His persecution continued until the end of the War and was even at times accompanied by threats of personal violence; slanders of the absurdest type had got a good start in the race, and it seemed impossible to overtake them. But at the end of it all there came another tribute: on the day of the Victory March when the massed colours of the army, wreathed in laurels, were carried above the heads of that long marching column, past the cenotaph and up the Mall, Haldane has related how he was sitting lonely in his house, when the bell rang and a servant told him that an officer was waiting below, and how Haig, fresh from his triumph, entered the room and welcomed him, and presented him with a book of his despatches, inscribed to 'the greatest Secretary of State for War that England has ever known'.

2

During my leave in England in the early summer of 1915 I met D. H. Lawrence and his wife who were staying near Littlehampton on the coast of Sussex. I saw him now and then, at scattered intervals, during later years, but I remember especially a walk which I went with him along the shore a few days before I was due to return to the front. Even this peaceful beach, lapped by flickering ripples, with its mirrored gulls glimmering beneath the veil of a summer morning, seemed somehow affected by the loaded air of the world, and the wide quietude of the Sussex coast, by the very

sharpness of contrast, brought memories of what was happening on the other side of the Channel. For Lawrence with his slender, spritelike figure the shore and the silvery lights on the sea were a more fitting background than the street of any town; in such a setting, in spite of his slouch hat, he could easily be imagined to be some spirit of Nature that might at any moment return to her and vanish like one of the gulls that wheeled above and curved away into the smoke of the sea-mist.

I carried in my pocket a small tousled copy of *Pickwick* which I had been reading in Flanders, and I thought, in a curious moment, of asking Lawrence his opinion of Dickens: the answer, though it might be explosive, could scarcely fail to be interesting, but before I could do so, he had already plunged into the subject of the War, and Dickens seemed in an instant removed by a vast chasm, impossible to span, beyond hope of return. It was typical of talk at that time that men usually began by trying to escape such an obvious theme as the War, but its pervasive air was felt at every place and moment, filtering its way, insidious and uninvited, into the crevices of the conversation, gradually gathering force, and, however the talk had started, forcing it away from its original course. But with Lawrence it was otherwise: if he was interested in a subject, he would dive into it with a clean plunge and without delay, and at this time the War was a subject which seemed to devour him with a curious alternation of hatred and fascination.

The reason for his fascination was that the emotions aroused by battle were deep and genuine, and however misguided he thought them, their very strength and sincerity caused, in his own phrase, ' a slump in trifling '.

But he hated war profoundly and during this walk he seemed to look on the future with deep agony of spirit: his main hope was that its violence might burn away, like a cautery, some of the elements which he disliked in modern life, but he detested this means of destroying them. His passionate individualism had no place in an embattled world, whose urgent commands were in obvious conflict with his whole theory of living.

He had been thinking lately of the small ideal community which he meant some day to found, where each man was to fulfil his own nature, where there was to be no struggle for money or power, where church and house and shop were to be the same thing, and the only riches those of character. To such a colony as this he wanted to sail away, and it seemed very remote at that time from the world as we knew it—the mechanical power of great armies and centralised commands, where wife and husband, girl and lover, mother and son, were daily separated for ever when some button was pressed by the distant hand of one who had never set eyes on any of them. He felt himself to be the prophet of a new gospel of life, pulsing and breathing, but for him war was the inhalation of death, and it meant the maiming of the spirit as well as the body.

As we sat on the dunes near the beach, he talked of these things in his terse, flashing phrases, but much less about his ideal community than about the War itself, and that not at all from the point of view of strategy or tactics, the movement of nations or men in the mass, but entirely from the angle of the individual soldier. He seemed to assume—almost as a matter of course—that the cause of the evil was the 'will to destroy', existing

in the nature of each individual fighter, and that the cause of war was the sum of all these separate desires demanding their satisfaction.

I did not agree with his contention, and argued that a delight in the mere act of destruction, such as that of a child in shattering a toy, though it might often be seen in grown-up iconoclasts, was not at all typical of soldiers. When I began to throw stones at a bottle that was bobbing about in the ripples, Lawrence regarded me for a moment with a humorous but baleful glance; he continued his mystic refrain about the 'will to destroy', and it was in vain that I protested that I had no passion for the destruction even of a medicine bottle.

The real difficulty, as it seemed to me, was not that the motives of individual soldiers were bad, but that they were admirable; for each of them, on whatever side he was fighting—English, French, Russian, German, or Italian—believed that he was defending his home and that God was on the same side as his own country. But it is certainly true that the will to power, which Lawrence regarded as a thoroughly false ideal, found in practice a very vain way of bringing benefit to the members of any state that took part in the War; it is staggering to think what might have been done for the good of humanity if all that wealth and the riches of those many lives with their talents, energies, and enthusiasms, had been devoted not to destruction, but to the single purpose of benefiting the lot of mankind.

3

Before returning to Flanders I met Arthur Balfour who was now First Lord of the Admiralty in the first Coalition Government. His biographer has told how

ten years before, during his own administration, he had shewn practical and scientific interest in the re-armament of the field artillery; and now, on the subject of the guns in Flanders, suddenly moving from his detachment, he asked me some quick pointful questions which shewed the keenness of his interest and also a high degree of technical knowledge.

I also had a talk with my father about Kitchener's views on the situation:

Myself: 'Does Kitchener think that the Western line will be broken?'

H. H. A. (with a very grave expression in his eyes): 'Yes, he thinks it will be broken in the end.'

Myself: 'After that there'll be a war of movement?'

H. H. A. 'Yes; in the end he thinks the whole thing will begin to move.'

Kitchener was not one of those who regarded this siege-line as 'impenetrable', and his prediction, like others from the same source, was proved to be true in the end.

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When I returned to Nieuport, I found that the conditions there were very much the same as when I had left it. There was the same 'morning and evening hate' and the same gradual attrition during the daily bombardment.

Our observation post near the railway was in an open position and our telephone wire was often blown to pieces. One day, when I was approaching this post, a heavy shell burst very close to me, and I found myself lying on the ground, scattered with débris and feeling extremely giddy. It was a lucky escape, but

not a pleasant experience. Deserted churches, crumpled ruins of steadings and estaminets that had long been our familiar landmarks, changed their shape week by week, until there was nothing left but a heap of rubble and powdered brick in which the weeds quickly rooted themselves and spread in a riot, often to be hurled skyward by another explosion. There were many raids of a minor nature resulting in sudden concentrations of fire and long lines of flares and rockets, rising and falling, and throwing their changing gleams and shadows on the lines of the trenches, the oily waters of the Yser, the wallowing wrecks of the barges, and the queer distorted ruins of the town. But during the summer there was no substantial change in the line near Nieuport or Dixmude.

I was invalided in the Autumn of 1915. After a long illness in England, I was given a commission in the R.F.A. of Kitchener's army, and returned again to the front early in 1917, just before the battle of Arras.

Chapter XVI

THE SOMME AND WHITEHALL

I

Sir Henry Wilson, who in a later year, when Mr. Lloyd George was in power, was appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff, has described in his diary the new forces raised by Lord Kitchener as 'Kitchener's ridiculous and preposterous army of twenty-five corps', and he added that they were the 'laughing stock of every soldier in Europe'—'Under no circumstances,' he wrote, 'could these mobs take the field for two years. Then what is the use of them?'

Though Wilson represented a certain section of professional opinion, it is fortunate indeed that he was far from representing it all; in the beginning of 1916 the skies looked black and baleful, and the main hope for the cause of the Allies and the Empire itself seemed to depend, almost entirely, on the qualities of this 'preposterous army'. If the weapon were inadequate, it would not be of much avail even if a genius were found to wield it; but a good army, being a weapon that lives and thinks, can effect a great deal by the mysterious power of its own collective will, even without the help of a genius in command; and when the time of necessity arrives, it is asking much of fortune to expect genius to be already in the saddle.

The Official History of the War, differing very

widely from Wilson, records that 'never before had the ranks of a British Army on the field of battle contained the finest of all classes of the nation, in physique, brains, and education'. As to the officers and men, few whom I knew, whatever their rank, shewed any complacency about their own capacities; they were very far from taking a heavy view of themselves and their most typical mood was one of humorous irony and self-depreciation: 'Thank God! we have a Navy!' was a phrase often heard, both in messes at home and in the dugouts of the line.

For Germany the main issue in 1915 had been the campaign in the East: Ludendorff's tactics had been to create a series of salients from which the Russians were forced to withdraw, and their vast forces, after a harassing retreat, finally came to a rest with one flank at Riga and the other near the frontier of Bessarabia. The British Army on the Western Front, viewed in the scale of continental war, was still comparatively small and the narrow frontages of its attack at such battles as Neuve Chapelle and Loos were the result of its own necessities; but both battles had been failures, in both our casualties had greatly exceeded those of the enemy and a heavy price had been paid for very slight results. In the East the situation was also disappointing: owing to the naval attack in March the landing at Gallipoli in April had wanted the element of surprise, and the result had been disastrous. "The English," wrote Liman von Sanders, "allowed us four good weeks of respite for all this work before their great disembarkation. . . . This respite just sufficed for the most indispensable measures to be taken."[1] But the enemy had not been warned of the

[1] *Funf Jahre Turkei*, p. 78.

evacuation and this perilous departure, in spite of the gloomiest prophecies of massacre, was carried out in December and January with complete success.

During this time of disappointment in the field preparations were being made with ardour and patience, which led three years later to success in the end: the year 1915 was the complex and difficult period of transition during which England changed her ways, brought to birth a continental army composed of volunteers and mobilized her industries for War; and finally, in January 1916, the Government introduced conscription. But failures in the field were more evident to the public mind than the preparations which were being made for the future, whose effects could not be felt immediately.

During this vital period of transition my father's task was greatly complicated by strong differences of opinion between civilians and soldiers, between Trades Unionists and conscriptionists, and between such prominent leaders as Kitchener and French on the one hand, and Kitchener and Mr. Lloyd George on the other. Rarely had a statesman been called upon to face so many difficulties combined with such vast responsibilities at home and abroad at the same moment. Towards composing these differences and trying to bring harmony out of discord he had to devote some part of his heavily burdened time. In his *Contemporary Notes*[1] during the earlier months of 1915 my father refers to some of these discords:

March 31: 'The most serious thing I have done today is to try to compose the Kitchener and Lloyd George dispute about the new committee. I think I shall

[1] *Memories and Reflections*, II, p. 70.

probably succeed, particularly as L. G. is now off thinking of anything but drink[1] and K. is occupied with shells. . . .'

On April 16th he records that he had rather a stormy experience: 'K., who is evidently a good deal perturbed, has been attacking L. G. for having disclosed to the Munitions Committee the figures which he, K., had confidentially communicated to the Cabinet. He declares that he can no longer be responsible for the War Office under such conditions. L. G. and Winston are both (the former having quite a presentable case) aggressive, and the situation is for the moment all the worse, particularly as Grey, a good deal to L. G.'s chagrin, strongly champions Kitchener. All this has come literally like a bolt out of the blue. I had not the faintest premonition of it. However, by dint of appeals and warnings and gives and takes and all sorts of devices and expedients I have succeeded in getting us back into more or less smooth water.'

In the High Command of Germany, between such figures as Ludendorff and Falkenhayn, there were also violent differences of opinion sometimes amounting to quarrels. The battles on the great fronts seemed to have minute reflections in the individual natures of men; the atmosphere of strife was pervasive, its spirit was borne on every wind and many cases are recorded where it hardened the hearts of women; it affected in a strange degree those who were not fighting themselves and whose emotions could not be purged by the greater violence of action. Thus it happened that many questions which in time of peace would have been settled placidly by the give and take of discussion, were now

[1] This refers to Mr. Lloyd George's agitation in support of temperance.

the signal for personal strife, friction, and acrimony, and sometimes ended in the parting of friends. If in time of war the Devil dances more merrily, it is a dance with many attendant demons, some tweaking and mischievous, others cold and malicious, but usually to be found in the greatest numbers at some distance from the real fumes of the fray.

In the early months of 1916 the period of preparation was bearing its fruit: Kitchener's army was ready to take the field in force, and the Ministry of Munitions was producing shells and guns for its use in quantities which vastly exceeded those of any peace-time calculation. My father had been in favour of the attack on the Dardanelles, but in general principle he was opposed to a dispersion of forces or to any transfer of troops from the Western Front which might seriously weaken the shield of the Channel ports. Haig, whom he had appointed Commander-in-Chief in December 1915, and Sir William Robertson, whom he had made Chief of the Imperial General Staff, were both of the Western school of thought.

Another appointment of the first importance was that of Mr. Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions. The Munitions Committee and the War Office had already greatly multiplied the output; but the Ministry under Mr. Lloyd George shewed in many ways a greater power of elasticity and a juster vision of the needs of the army than had been shewn by the War Office: in the face of official prejudice the number of machine-guns for each battalion was raised from four to sixteen; the light mortar, which was afterwards to win fame as 'the Stokes gun', was brought to birth and multiplied, and encouragement was given to those gifted nurses who bent with hopeful affection over the infancy of the tank. In the

period of transition and improvisation mistakes were bound to be made, but in this Ministry Mr. Lloyd George did great service to the new armies; his power of conciliating workmen, his capacity for hewing a path through prejudice, his restless energy, sometimes flashing and fitful, but often acting with the melting force of a blowpipe, were all qualities that fitted him for his new office.

2

In 1916, while I was doing a course of training in the R.F.A., I saw my father now and then at Walmer Castle, at Bognor or at Downing Street during scattered intervals of leave. Walmer had once been a blockhouse built for coast defence in the days of Henry VIII and for many years had been the residence of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. Here William Pitt had lived, and here Wellington died after rising from his narrow camp-bed, looking—as he had often been seen in life—'as though he were having a little sleep in his chair'.

The King had offered my father the post of Lord Warden, but he had thought that he could not afford it, and Lord Beauchamp who had been appointed to it lent him the Castle as a kind of unofficial 'Chequers' where he could spend his Saturdays and Sundays during these years of crisis. Walmer was within easy reach of G.H.Q. in France and important conversations were held there with Kitchener, French, Haig, and other soldiers in an atmosphere more congenial than that of Whitehall.

My father's Sundays at Walmer, though a change from London, were very far from being a rest: a soldier in billets or a sailor in harbour may have a few days of

ease, a respite from his duties; but for a Prime Minister in the long crisis of a great war there is no rest, no ease, no respite, no time of leave to which he can look forward, no release day or night from the weight and urgency of his responsibilities. He must bear the load of Atlas and bear it continuously. Every step that he takes is watched by people whose sense of criticism is twisted by the tension of their own nerves, and by a curious human instinct they are eager to find some victim who shall be made to pay for the stress of their own emotions.

The process of transition from a nation into an army, the mobilisation of industry, the introduction of conscription, questions of high strategy and questions where the rules of strategy seemed to point in one direction and those of political policy in another—all these were points on which many people held different opinions: the burden of opinions can be lightly borne; even those whose views are violent and who hold them in great numbers, are rarely oppressed by their weight. But decisions are another matter altogether: on all questions of importance the final judgment lay with the Prime Minister; and the facts on which these decisions for action are grounded in time of war are often of such a secret nature that they cannot be revealed to the public in order to make a defence against attacks which are based on a partial and clouded knowledge.

At Walmer, early in 1916, I went for a short walk with my father in the garden during a brief interval in his work. It was clear then that the War was reaching its climax and that everything was soon to be put to the touch; but he seemed in good health and spirits, cool and resolute, taking that calm balanced view which was needed for practical decisions in a frenzied world. His

constitution, which he described as being 'equally compounded of iron and leather', had stood extremely well against the enormous strain that had been put upon it. He shewed the keenest interest in the life of the regimental soldier, he came to know many officers from the line, some of whom were friends of his sons, and he was very far from confining himself to official channels of information; he liked making short cuts to knowledge and from his contacts with junior officers he was able to gather with great quickness any detail he wanted, and to store it up for use in his certain and capacious memory: in this way he saw the War from three points of view—the bird's eye view of Downing Street, that of the Staffs in France, and the closer outlook of the regimental soldier—angles and perspectives which were widely different, but all equally necessary for his knowledge.

In the early months of the year my brother Arthur returned on leave from the island of Lemnos where he had been sent with his men after the evacuation of Gallipoli, and from him and other regimental soldiers my father learnt at first hand some of the problems of trench warfare in the East, something also of the initiative of the Turkish soldiers who after the landing at Helles, had succeeded in creeping through our lines and sniping our troops from the rear.

My brother was in the Hood battalion during the expedition to the East, the same battalion as Rupert Brooke. Rupert had shared a billet with him after the retreat from Antwerp and came to stay at Downing Street in January 1915 before sailing for the Dardanelles. They sailed in the same ship, the *Grantully Castle*, and on the 17th of April they landed on the island of Scyros.

My brother described the island in a letter to his sister as 'one great rock-garden of white and pinkish-white marble, with small red poppies and every sort of wild-flower; in the gorges ilex, dwarf holly and occasional groups of olives; and everywhere the smell of thyme. In this island garden the men killed adders and had 'fun with big tortoises.'

Sir Edward Marsh has told in his memoir how Rupert Brooke died in the French hospital ship, the *Duguay-Trouin*, on the 23rd of April, 'the day of Shakespeare and St. George'. My brother described to me how he landed on the island with other officers to find a place for the burial, passing over a sea floored with blocks and ledges of marble, and the small lamplit procession climbing slowly upward along a rough stony glen to bury him in a lovely spot, scented with sage and thyme, with a few wild olives growing near the head of the grave.[1]

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Early next morning their ship weighed anchor and sailed for the Gulf of Saros and on the night of the 25th of April, Bernard Freyberg swam ashore in order to mislead the Turks as to the place where our troops intended to land. In order to carry out the feint warships bombarded the Bulair lines at the northern end of the peninsula, and transports of the R.N.D. lay ostentatiously a few miles from the coast

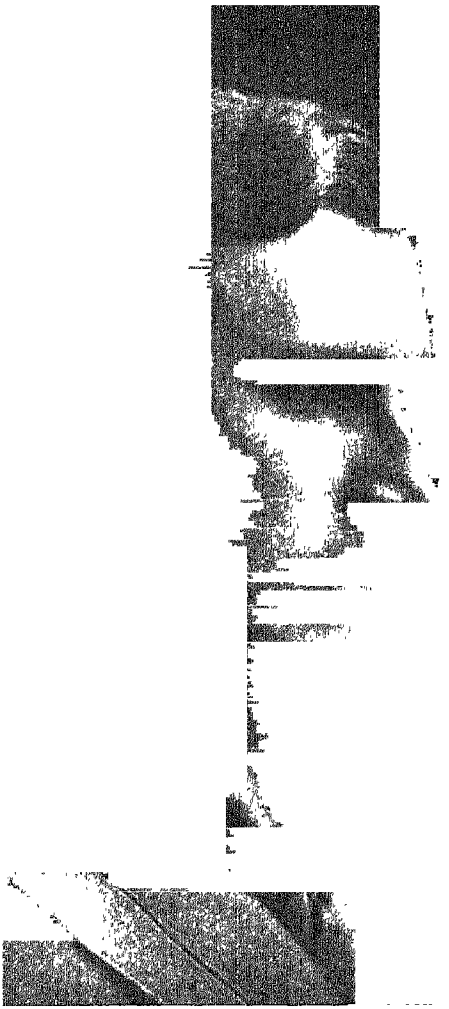
[1] A full description of the burial is given in Denis Browne's letter, which is published in Sir Edward Marsh's Memoir. Wild flowers were strewn in the grave and Bernard Freyberg, Denis Browne, Arthur Asquith, Charles Lister and 'Cleg' Kelly stayed behind after the ceremony and gathered fragments of marble to lay above it. One who was present has told me that Patrick Shaw Stewart was prevented from staying behind, as he was in charge of the firing party and had to march them back to the shore.

of the Gulf. Reconnaissances of landing-places were carried out by some of the ships; but it was decided also that a few troops should actually land during the night of the 25th and by their activity impersonate a much greater force.

Freyberg's platoon was ordered to carry out this enterprise; but he pointed out that after the naval demonstration the casualties would probably be extremely heavy and volunteered to swim ashore alone. The story of that swim is well known: a little coracle, made out of wood and canvas by the ship's carpenter, was laden with a number of flares, a signalling light, a revolver, a knife, and a flask of brandy; Freyberg was painted black and covered with grease to keep out the cold; after being lowered into the water he swam for two miles through an icy sea, pushing the coracle in front of him, and lit the flares at different points on the northern shore of the Gulf, far away from the peninsula. Before returning he crawled up the slope and made a reconnaissance of some trenches at the top of it; it was a dark starless night and it was past three in the morning when he was picked up at last by a boat, cramped with the cold after his long perilous swim.

This act was a classic instance of how much in a war of millions a single man may do, and it has been said with justice that it was an outstanding proof that in war 'it is the man, and not men, who counts.'[1] Freyberg's swim formed a vital part of the ruse, and the ruse succeeded: General Liman von Sanders had formed the opinion that the right strategy for the attack was to capture the isthmus at Bulair, and he now had reason to think that his own views were shared by the British

[1] See *History of the World War* by Liddell Hart, p. 232.



RAYMOND ASQUITH, 1915

commander. Von Sanders took up his post of command about thirty miles from the beaches, near the centre of the Bulair lines; as a result of the feint the Turkish forces at the main points of attack were denied reinforcements which might well have turned the scale in the battle for the beaches, if they had arrived earlier.[1] In 1916, as a battalion commander, Bernard Freyberg won the V.C. at the battle of the Ancre.

The casualties of the Royal Naval Division in the campaign of Gallipoli were extremely heavy; among my brother's friends, who had landed at Scyros, Browne, Lister, Shaw Stewart and Kelly were all killed or mortally wounded during the War; my brother Arthur and Freyberg were both severely wounded within the next few weeks, but they returned to the front, and both served with the rearguard of our departing troops on the day of the final evacuation.

During the campaigns of 1916 and 1917 Arthur fought with his battalion in France and Flanders. In 1917 he was awarded a D.S.O. for gallantry in a night attack on the Ancre; to this two bars were added in the same year and he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier-General. He was wounded four times in all, once in Gallipoli and three times in France. In December 1917 he was making a reconnaissance on a misty day close to the German line on Welsh Ridge near Cambrai when he was fired at by a German sniper: he was grazed by two of the bullets but severely wounded by the third, and as he could not walk, he had to roll back over the snow in order to reach his own trench. Owing to this

[1] See *Official History: Gallipoli*, p. 163. Mr. Douglas Jerrold relates that one of the Turkish divisions based on Maidos was actually moved northwards, when the R.N.D. transports were sighted. See *Royal Naval Division*, p. 81.

wound he lost his leg and after long fighting and winning many honours he could return no more.

3

The main purpose of the Central Powers was to conquer each enemy separately: in 1914 their aim had been France, in 1915 it was Russia; and at the end of the year the Allies had agreed to meet the danger of 1916 by a combined offensive on all fronts at once, which was to take place in the summer.

This plan of the Allies for united action was met towards the end of February 1916 by the German attack on Verdun which raised the curtain on one of the longest and bloodiest actions of the War. It was an action aimed deliberately at the extinction of the French Army as a fighting force: its main effect was attrition, and at this gloomy art the Germans shewed themselves more efficient and more economical of their own men in the continuous exchange of lives than either the French or the English. Their remorseless pressure on the French was in some measure relieved in June by the brilliant victory of the Russian general Brusiloff against two Austrian armies, and later by Haig's attack on the Somme.

On the 1st of July, after a week's bombardment, the men of the new armies made their first great assault on the German trenches, the main front of the attack being about 14 miles in width between Serre and Maricourt. This was a critical date in the history of the War not only because it proved the mettle of which the new armies were made, but also because from that time forth England was to take her full part in the campaign of the west. In choosing this sector for attack in spite

of the strength of its defences, Haig was acting against his own inclinations under pressure from Joffre; his own plan had been an advance along the coast from Nieuport to Ostend, which was to be combined with the landing of additional troops and naval support, a scheme that was never carried out.

The official historian observes that 'the problem facing the Allies was, in fact, that of storming a fortress', that the sector chosen for the attack might be considered the strongest on the Western Front, and that the reasons advanced by Joffre for attacking it 'will hardly bear examination'. In the tactics of the attack the British generals were faced with their old dilemma, not easy to solve: without the help of a prolonged bombardment there seemed little hope of breaching the enemy's fortifications, but if such a preparation were made, there was no chance of taking them by surprise. In a later phase of the War this problem was solved by bombardments at once short and intense, such as that carried out by the Germans at the battle of St. Quentin in 1918, which lasted not for days but only for a few hours.

The chief among a multitude of difficulties that faced the officers and men of the new armies was caused by the fire of machine guns: the lock of the machine gun is a minute mechanism, measured only by inches, but it was deadly in its effect on advancing troops; manned by resolute men, in heavily fortified nests, these guns could pour their streams of bullets through the moving curtain of the artillery barrage, causing enormous casualties among the infantry, who were advancing behind it, and when the curtain had passed beyond, they would often continue their fire. As a weapon of defence the machine gun had many advantages: its effect was

the same as that of a great number of rifles, but it presented only a midget target and its brisk deadly chatter was not at all easy to locate. Its lightness and mobility made it useful in open warfare as well as in the defence of fortified posts; as a locust may be lord of the harvest, so this insect among weapons continued to dominate the vast battlefields of the War.

Among the warring nations the English were the first to discover an antidote, and they did this by making a new application of an old principle. The idea of protecting men by armour which they do not wear as part of their equipment, is familiar in the Navy, and on land it is said that fighting chariots were used by the Chinese as early as 1200 B.C. Later descendants of the chariot were the Tudor war carts of the 15th century some of which were armed with guns; but the tank was directly descended from an instrument of peace, an agricultural tractor invented by Holt and used in America, which by the use of the caterpillar device laid down its own unending track as it moved on its placid mission across the plains of the West. In the first months of the War Mr. Churchill had been considering the possible developments of the armoured car in order to meet the conditions of trench warfare, and in September 1914 at his request a design was made by Admiral Bacon of a car carrying a bridge; on arriving at a trench it dropped this bridge in front for its own use, and after crossing, automatically raised it up behind. At the front Colonel Swinton had been occupied with the same problem and reached a somewhat similar solution: in October 1914, after meeting with little encouragement at G.H.Q., he put his suggestions for developing the Holt tractor before Colonel Maurice

Hankey, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Colonel Hankey submitted to my father a memorandum on methods for overcoming the deadlock and these included Colonel Swinton's suggestion. In a letter written to my father in January 1915 Mr. Churchill warmly supported it. The War Office was still sceptical, but at the Admiralty the imaginative touch of Mr. Churchill swiftly brought into being a 'Landships Committee', and in July official resistance at the War Office was at last overcome by a direct appeal made by Colonel Swinton to the Commander-in-Chief.

After these multitudinous labours the tank known as 'Little Willie' was at last brought to birth in September 1915; but a more historic date was the 2nd of February, 1916, when his brother 'Big Willie' was put through his official trial at Hatfield. He and his many descendants were none of them beautiful children: they did not possess the slim gliding lines of a destroyer at sea or the gay racing charm of a chariot; in appearance they were grimly useful and free from any adornment, lozenges of steel armed with guns whose barrels protruded from little turrets on either side, and wrapped round from stem to stern with the steel bands on which they made their way.

It had been intended by their inventors that they should be launched on the enemy in force as a bold surprise on a large scale. G.H.Q., however, decided to make an experiment with a small number, and 24 of them crossed the German line in the British attack between Mouquet Farm and Ginchy on the 15th of September, 1916. The tanks did well, but it is strange that the advantages of the experiment should have

been considered greater than the disadvantages of giving away the secret. In spite of this mistake, as had often happened before in the history of her wars, England was favoured by a caprice of Fortune: when the Germans prematurely disclosed the secret of gas, the Allies had soon retaliated by the same means; but in the case of the tanks the premature disclosure was to some extent retrieved by the failure of the Germans to realise the importance of the new invention: in their great sally at St. Quentin in March 1918 we were much surprised to find that tanks were not taking part in the German attack, and when at last, in the final phase of the War, their value was recognised by the Germans, it was already too late for them to retrieve their mistake.[1]

The battle of the Somme with its long series of actions continued from the 1st of July to the middle of November. During this period division after division of Kitchener's army and the Territorials passed through something that was much more than a baptism of fire: they were faced by the finest professional soldiers in positions of enormous strength, protected by thousands of machine-guns and a mass of heavy artillery; many battalions suffered in a single day of this long battle such enormous losses in officers and men that according to previous calculation and the experience of other wars their morale should have failed and they should have ceased to exist as effective forces; but again and again in those long months of the summer and autumn they advanced into action, again and again the gaps in their ranks were filled. Owing to their great losses

[1] Though tanks were not employed at St. Quentin itself, a few were used by the Germans on other sectors of this battle; but their numbers were negligible.

formations were in a continual state of change: men had lost the officers they had known and followed, and there were few in the ranks who had not lost many comrades; but they still fought on, and little by little they thrust back the army of Germany at Thiepval, Pozières, and Montauban, at Courcelette and Ginchy, Flers, Morval, and Combles.

Those gains seem small on the map, amounting in the whole course of the fighting to an advance of about seven miles at the deepest point; yet the greatest gains of the battle are not to be seen on any map of that deadly network of captured trenches, but in the relief of the pressure on Verdun, and most of all in a blow to the fighting power of the German Army from which according to the evidence of their own historians the Germans never again recovered.

4

Between the Ancre and the Somme a large part of the finest youth of the Empire fell with that of France and Germany, mingled on the same desolate field. There were few families now which had not felt a loss; this War of the Great Powers had invaded many sunlit islands. As men of the highest talent are often the bravest, many fell on both sides who were marked by Nature to lead their countries in years to come, in art and in letters and along the paths of thoughtful statesmanship, so that their deaths came to be felt by each country not only at the time, but twenty years later, when they would have naturally come into their own, and the torn and pitted land on which they fell had long lost any sign of its scars.

With many others of promise and distinction Raymond

Asquith was mortally wounded on the 15th of September while leading his men into action near the village of Ginchy. He had joined the Queen's Westminsters in the early days of the War, but was later transferred into the Grenadier Guards. My father, who had been on one of his visits to France, had seen his sons Raymond and Arthur a few days before, and he had only just returned to England when he heard of Raymond's death. Men often had presentiments during the War which were strangely fulfilled, but his father during that brief visit had no premonition of what was so swiftly to follow: 'When I saw Raymond last,' he wrote to a friend, 'exactly a fortnight ago today—he was so radiantly strong and confident that I came away from France with an easier mind.' He was deeply shaken by the news, nor was he ever again to suffer anything that could be compared with the force of this blow.

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Before the War, living in happiness with his wife and children, Raymond had been in practice at the Bar, and he was chosen as the Liberal candidate for Derby; but he regarded the Bar as a means rather than an end and he spoke of the law as 'a lean casuistical business'. He used to talk of the 'bleak futility' of ordinary politics, but he was a brilliant speaker, and if he had entered the House, there is little doubt that he would have made his presence felt. He had a pronounced distaste for the arts of the demagogue and his style of speaking was more suited to the House of Commons than to the platform of a big meeting. In his nature with its many facets, some of them shining with a cool light and others full of colour, there was more of

the soldier than the lawyer. He had been amused by the idea of being a soldier, but having become one, he seemed to find in that army a natural place for his spirit.

As a classical scholar he had eclipsed his father's record, but the variety of his gifts, the combination of different qualities in his mind gave him a rarer distinction than his powers as a scholar.

The roving and vaulting fancy with which he wove the stories of his boyhood, still lived in him as a man, and found expression in some of his verses and in the letters to his friends written in that swift flowing hand whose ease and grace seemed in many ways typical of the mind that lay behind it. Many of his friends agree with Lord Tweedsmuir that a number of these letters (which have not been published) may well be held to be among the best written in our time. Of his verses a few appear in the *Book of the Horace Club* and some of them were printed in the *Life of Lord Oxford*, but apart from these, and his letters, very little survives.

Enough has been said to shew that he did not look with much enthusiasm on the career at the Bar and in politics, which seemed to face him like a journey which has already been charted out on the map; but in the course of that journey he might well have found a cause which would have called forth the highest powers of his nature. Towards many aspects of life he was full of zest, delighting as he did in the company of his many friends, in ranging the hills of Westmorland, or shooting with Aubrey Herbert among the lovely coverts of Pixton.

Raymond's many-sided nature possessed exactly those qualities which made the strongest appeal to his father, and this appeal was partly one of difference, for they

were very far from being identical characters. He shared Raymond's distrust of easy enthusiasms and surface emotions—not because he did not feel, but because he distrusted easy feeling; he took pride and pleasure in Raymond's intellectual power, so widely removed from the tracks of pedantry, in his humour with its strange antiseptic touch, his fine felicity of phrase, the fancy that coloured his letters, and the sudden swiftness of his wit that would often set the table in a roar.

Now all this was gone to join that other wealth, the talent that should have belonged to the future, which was being buried day by day along the vast sweep of the Western Line, a hoard beyond recall.

5

It was a long way from the epic battles of young soldiers in France to the political manœuvres in London, a distance not be reckoned by the map or measured by the few hundred miles that lay between the men on the Somme and the men in Whitehall. During the earlier months of 1916, before the political crisis began, my father had more than once been warned by his friends to guard his position; but he was not of a suspicious nature and at this time he was deeply occupied with many interests far vaster than his own. In 1915 he had received from Mr. Lloyd George assurances of loyalty, which he records in one of his *Contemporary Notes*: 'As for himself (L. G.) he declared that he owed everything to me, that I had stuck to him and protected him and defended him when every man's hand was against him and that he would rather (1) break stones, (2) dig potatoes, (3) be hung and quartered (these were

metaphors used at different stages of his broken but impassioned harangue) than do an act or say a word or harbour a thought that was disloyal to me, and he said that every one of his colleagues felt the same.'[1] The date of this note was March 1915; but in December 1916 things had changed, and this loyalty, if it survived, found a very singular means of expression.

On the 14th of November my father went to Paris to confer with French statesmen about plans for 1917, and he had only lately returned to England when the political crisis began: Mr. Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Carson were now ranged against him and they were aided by a violent section of the press, especially by Lord Northcliffe's newspapers.

The story of the crisis is familiar and a full account of it is outside the scope of this book; the evidence has been examined in detail by Mr. Spender in his calm daylight analysis in the *Life of Lord Oxford;* since then some new material has been added in *Down the Years* by Sir Austen Chamberlain, in the Life of Lord Balfour, and in the *War Memoirs* of Mr. Lloyd George. The composition of a small War Cabinet and its relationship to the Prime Minister were the subjects of discussion between Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George and there seemed a good chance of adjusting their differences. The crisis became acute when articles on this highly confidential subject suddenly appeared in a section of the press which was known to be supporting Mr. Lloyd George.

According to Lord Beaverbrook, one of these articles, which appeared in *Reynolds's newspaper* on Sunday, the 3rd of December, the opening day of the crisis, " looked on the surface as if it had been directly inspired.

[1] *Memories and Reflections*, II, 70.

It was like an interview with Lloyd George written in the third person." It contained a definite threat that if his terms were not granted he would resign and start a campaign in the country against the Government.[1] It was obvious that just before the opening of the real campaign of 1917, a political contest in the country might do serious injury to the cause of the nation. It was clear also that if Mr. Lloyd George were in fact working in with the press against his own leader, such action by a minister would undermine any system of Cabinet government.

In this contest my father was in many ways at a great disadvantage. His strongest weapons were those of argument in open debate or on a public platform; but at a crisis in the War he felt it was an impossible course to conduct a campaign in the country in his own interest. He was not versed in the tactics that were being employed against him and the weapons of intrigue were not part of his equipment: he was the last person in the world whom one would expect to find lurking in the shadow of a doorway in order to pounce out on an opponent and take him by surprise. As Mr. Spender has pointed out with force, he had neither the skill nor the inclination for 'arts and strategems.' He had the reputation, testified to by his colleagues, of taking on his own shoulders the blame that properly belonged to others. On this point Lord Grey—with many others—has given his witness: "Asquith took no trouble to secure his own position or to add to his personal reputation. When things were going well with his Government he would be careful to see that any colleague got the credit, if he were entitled to it without regard to whether

[1] *Politicians and the War*, p. 249.

any credit would be given to or left for himself. On the other hand, if things were going badly he was ready to stand in front and accept all responsibility; a colleague who got into trouble was sure that the Prime Minister would stand by him."[1] This habit of standing in front and accepting responsibility earned gratitude from hip colleagues, but it also made him a target for attack ans assisted those who were engaged on the genial task of loading on his shoulders failures for which he was in no way to blame. It is probable also that he underestimated the increase of power which is wielded by the press in time of war, when its propaganda can work upon nerves which are in a high state of tension owing to the stress of long anxiety.

December 1916 was in many ways a favourable month for those who wished to undermine his position. The strain of war had been felt for more than two years; victory was not yet in sight and many men were ready to accept any change, however speculative, that might seem to bring it nearer. Rumania had been invaded by Mackensen; this invasion and even more the heavy losses on the Somme had had a depressing effect on the public mind.

Ludendorff has recorded that after the Somme, if the War lasted, German defeat seemed inevitable; that 'the future looked dark'; that 'the German Army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out.'

We know these things now, but, of course, they were not known then: the ordinary citizen looking at his newspaper, had watched our line on the Somme creeping forward very slowly, week by week, month by month; he had seen that the total advance on the

[1] *Twenty-five Years*, by Lord Grey, II, 240.

British front was at no point more than a few miles in depth, and in his newspaper too he had seen the price in junior officers and private soldiers that had been paid for it, but he had no means of gauging the blow to the German Army, the shock to their morale, or the effect on the mind of Ludendorff. In these and in other ways public opinion, much worked upon by a bitter section of the press, was widely separated from the real facts. But among Ministers with their better sources of information and also among members of Parliament there is little doubt that the majority of Unionists as well as the Liberals were supporters of Asquith's leadership.

Among evidence recently published Sir Austen Chamberlain in his contemporary letter to Lord Chelmsford describes the attitude of the Unionist Ministers: "On Sunday (December 3rd) morning the Unionist members of the Cabinet, with the exception of Balfour, who was ill in bed, and Lansdowne, who was in the country, met at Bonar Law's house. The Sunday papers known to be in close relation with Lloyd George announced that he had presented his terms to the Prime Minister; that they had been rejected and that Lloyd George's resignation would appear in Monday's papers. It was obvious that the situation was quite intolerable. Lloyd George was in revolt and the controversy on his side was being carried on in the Press by partial and inaccurate revelations."[1]

This letter also confirms my father's account, given in *Memories and Reflections* that the resolution passed by the Unionist ministers on this Sunday was not shewn to him by Bonar Law at their interview on the same day.

[1] *Down the Years*, p. 117.

This resolution urged the Prime Minister to tender the resignation of the Government and added that if he felt unable to take that step, the Unionist ministers authorised Bonar Law to tender their resignations; but it also contained a most important paragraph which reflected on the methods of Mr. Lloyd George: 'It is evident that a change must be made and in our opinion the publicity given to the intentions of Mr. Lloyd George makes reconstruction from within no longer possible.'

Sir Austen relates in his letter that what passed at the first interview on Sunday between Asquith and Bonar Law was 'somewhat obscure' and then continues: 'He (Asquith) invited Bonar Law to see him again after his interview with Lloyd George, and meantime Bonar Law consented not to hand him our resignation. This was comparatively unimportant, but unfortunately he refrained from handing him our resolution, which he had not even read to him.' He adds in comment that they did not suspect Bonar Law of bad faith: "We thought that he had blundered. We raised no objection to his holding up the formal presentation of our resignations for the few hours which the Prime Minister asked for consideration, but we felt strongly that the actual words of our resolution should have been communicated to him and a copy informally given to him. The sequel shews that we were right; for lack of this commonplace precaution, misunderstandings followed which could easily have been avoided. Our real complaint was that Bonar Law was acting with Lloyd George and Carson to the exclusion of his Unionist colleagues in the cabinet."[1]

[1] *Ibid.*, 119, 120.

On Sunday evening my father thought that by reconstruction without resignation he would be able to form a Government which would give him supreme control over the War Council, and also ensure that the personnel of the Council was well qualified for its duties. He accordingly advised the King on the same evening that reconstruction was necessary.

On Monday the 4th of December he read a leader in *The Times* which in his view disclosed confidential information about his negotiations on the question of the War Committee, and also contained a violent attack on himself.[1] On the same day he wrote two letters to Mr. Lloyd George; in the first he pointed out 'the infinite possibilities of misunderstanding' if the Prime Minister were not Chairman of the Committee; in the second, which was written after consulting his Liberal colleagues, he stated that on full consideration he had come to the conclusion that the new War Committee could not be made effective without the

[1] Lord Beaverbrook has stated that this article was written after a talk between the Editor of *The Times* and Carson and was not inspired by Mr. Lloyd George; and Mr. Lloyd George has written in his *War Memoirs* (II, p. 982) "I wish to confirm Lord Beaverbrook's statement that Lord Northcliffe was never, at any stage, brought into our consultations." Lord Beaverbrook records two interviews between Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Northcliffe at this time, one at the War Office on the 1st of December which was followed by an article in *The Times*, "favourable to the cause of the revolters", and another on the 2nd of December, after which the *Evening News* shewed on its posters "Lloyd George packing up". (*Politicians and the War*, p. 199.) Mr. Tom Clarke, who was employed by Lord Northcliffe, records another interview with Mr. Lloyd George on the 3rd of December: "The Chief returned to town after visiting his mother in the country, and at 7 o'clock he was at the War Office with Lloyd George". (*My Northcliffe Diary*, p. 106.) It may perhaps be concluded that though there was not full confidence, there were at any rate interviews between Lord Northcliffe and the revolters, and these were followed by articles in their favour.

Prime Minister as its Chairman. 'I cannot,' he added, 'be a party to any suggestion that Mr. Balfour' (the first Lord of the Admiralty) 'should be displaced.' He wrote further that he did not regard Sir Edward Carson as 'the man best qualified' to be a member of the Committee. The governing consideration for its composition should be 'special capacity.'[1]

On the 5th of December, in reply to this letter, Mr. Lloyd George sent in his resignation which was coupled with a very clear statement that he intended to open a campaign in the country against the Government. On the same day the Unionist ministers insisted on the resignation of the Government and Balfour, who had been confined to his bed, wrote to Asquith to say that he was in favour of the 'new War Council à la George'; it was clear now that the idea of reconstruction was no longer possible, and my father tendered his resignation to the King.

On the 6th of December the 'all-round talk' took place at Buckingham Palace with three, or perhaps four, possible Prime Ministers sitting at the table, Bonar Law, Mr. Lloyd George, Asquith and Balfour.

As regards the termination of this conference, the memorandum made by Balfour confirms Lord Crewe's account of what my father told his late Liberal colleagues immediately after his return from the Palace. It has been pointed out in the Life of Lord Balfour that Mr. Lloyd George's account is not corroborated by either of these contemporary documents: according to Mr. Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* (II, p. 997): 'It is now a matter of history how we expressed our readiness to serve under Mr. Balfour—all of us except

[1] *Life of Lord Oxford*, II, 264, 265.

Mr. Asquith, who asked indignantly, "What is the proposal? That I, who have held first place for eight years should be asked to take a secondary position?" This broke up the conference.'

But neither Lord Crewe nor Balfour makes any suggestion whatever that the idea of Balfour becoming Prime Minister was ever discussed at the Palace: their memoranda agree that the last question discussed at this conference was whether Asquith would serve under Bonar Law or Lloyd George and according to both Asquith decided to 'consult his friends' on this point. It is hard to believe that if a Balfour Government was the subject of debate, Balfour himself should have omitted to mention the fact in his own memorandum, especially if the conference broke up on this particular issue.[1]

The reasons why my father refused to serve are clearly stated by Lord Crewe and they do not include a private sense of personal dignity: in the meeting held after Asquith's return from the Palace Lord Crewe relates that all the Liberal ministers except Mr. Montagu took the view 'that the combination would be mistaken and futile, and it was strongly expressed by Mr. Mckinnon Wood, Lord Buckmaster, Mr. McKenna, Mr. Runciman, Lord Grey, and myself.' It was difficult to see how in these circumstances my father could abandon his colleagues and in fact he agreed with their view.[2] They

[1] Lord Balfour's biographer suggests that on this point Mr. Lloyd George's memory has played him false and that his own willingness and Mr. Bonar Law's to serve under Balfour were expressed not at the Palace, but in Carlton Gardens, 'where Mr. Asquith never had an opportunity of agreeing or refusing to accept a place in a Balfour administration'. See *Arthur James Balfour*, II, 177.

[2] See *Memories and Reflections*, II, 136.

thought that the scheme would not work in practice and that a better service would be done to the country by forming a watchful and patriotic Opposition than by patching up a façade of unity which was not based on reality. Both Unionists and Liberals felt that the new Government at the strange moment of its birth should be given as good a chance as possible; but the Liberals thought that if they formed part of it, it would not be long before the joints again began to creak and another rupture took place from within.

The cynic who studies the records of these days may easily raise an eyebrow when he sees the Unionists flocking to take office on Thursday under the Minister whom they had censured on Sunday, and Balfour, whom Asquith had so strongly defended when Mr. Lloyd George tried to get him removed from the Admiralty, now throwing his weight into the scale against his own supporter.[1] The defence in each case was national necessity: powerful factors in the whole affair were the strong wind blowing from the press and Mr. Lloyd George's threat to carry out a campaign in the country at a time of national crisis. Those essential things that lead to victory, the true principles of strategy, the right admiral, the best general, seem to have been left entirely outside the discussions.

Mr. Lloyd George's more moderate critics have recognised his courage, his energy, and his power of

[1] Mrs. Dugdale relates that Balfour was much impressed by Mr. Lloyd George's work in creating the Department of Munitions and his organisation of Transport. He added that 'in many ways Mr. Lloyd George was probably a very bad War Minister.' Nevertheless about the end of December 1916 he did not object to the idea of Mr. Lloyd George becoming 'a Dictator.' These views were expressed in conversation and cannot perhaps be given the force of considered opinions. See *Arthur James Balfour*, II, 170.

sustaining morale at home; there was no one who did not desire a short way to victory, but there were many who feared that his tendency to reflect the popular mood might often be at variance with the real principles of war. One result of the new Government which soon became evident, was a growing distrust between the new Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief in the field; another was that the moderating influence of Asquith and Grey was withheld from the Peace Conference at Versailles, and their absence at that time, when they were most needed, may well have had profound results on the future of which we have not yet seen the end. Mr. Lloyd George had asked for a 'change in the direction of the War', but until the end of it Beatty and Haig, the officers appointed by Asquith, remained in command of the Fleet and the Army.

In January 1917 Mr. Lloyd George proposed a march on Vienna through the Julian Alps, a suggestion which made little appeal to the General Staffs of either Britain or France. It was pleasant for the public to think that somewhere, hidden from the ordinary mind, there was an imaginative path that led by a short cut to victory, a way that might at any moment be found. If such a path existed, perhaps the quickest means of discovering it was first to find a Napoleon and then to watch where and how he attacked; but search as they would, no one could find him. In 1917 the direction of the War shewed little change, and the number of casualties on the Western Front was now vastly increased. The grim science of strategy does not wait on the moods of rhetoric; more and more, as the struggle came to its climax, the centre of gravity was concentrated in the west; this process was inexorable; it was beyond

the power of phrases and no argument could stay its course. In 1918 when 'the impenetrable barrier' was broken and the vast armies changed into motion, at the time of St. Quentin, and the day when Haig's troops broke the Hindenburg Line, there were not many eyes in England that were turning towards the passes of the Alps.

Chapter XVII

ARRAS AND PASSCHENDAELE

I

Before our advance to the battle of Arras our own division (the 30th) was in the line a few miles to the south of the town. It had been a hard winter, but in February 1917 there were periods of sudden thaw, and the surface of the narrow country roads broke up into cracks and fissures oozing with liquid mud; it mounted into small bulging hills and the valleys between them and the shell-holes that scarred them were filled with greasy lakes; the brownish pools in the centre of the road had the appearance of melting coffee ice and reached up to the hocks of our horses. In the beginning of February our battery of eighteen-pounder field guns was in position in the line; there were occasional bursts of fire from the Germans, and on one night some of our cigarettes were infected with gas, but the general conditions were those of 'peace warfare'.

One day on my way to the line I saw an instance of a simple but effective stratagem which caused some expense to the Germans: not far from the shell-torn road someone had put up a dummy gun; as I was passing the position it was soon clear that this curious weapon had deceived a German observation officer and I watched a very interesting exhibition of shooting by

one of their batteries. On both sides the line was quiet, but here alone the peace was broken by the explosions of the ranging shells bursting on either side of the dummy and before long the whole battery was concentrating its fire on two old wheels from a cart and a baulk of timber. The value of the dummy might be assessed at a few shillings, but the ammunition spent on its destruction may well have cost sixty or seventy pounds.[1]

While the guns were in position we kept our horses in a deserted village behind the line. Most of them had been housed by our sergeant-major, a soldier of long experience, in the parlours of a row of houses in the main street; many of the roofs had been hit by shells, but below there was fairly good shelter; some of our horses were standing on parquet floors which had been strewn with straw to prevent their hoofs from slipping and it was very pleasant to see their dark hairy heads nuzzling out of the shattered windows and looking curiously into the empty street. One day when I was down at the wagon-line and the horses were beginning to feed, a French officer came round the corner of the road; he gave me rather a formal salute and it was soon clear that he was concerned with claims against the British Government.

"Your horses occupy our houses," he said with great politeness.

"They're not what I should call houses, sir," said the

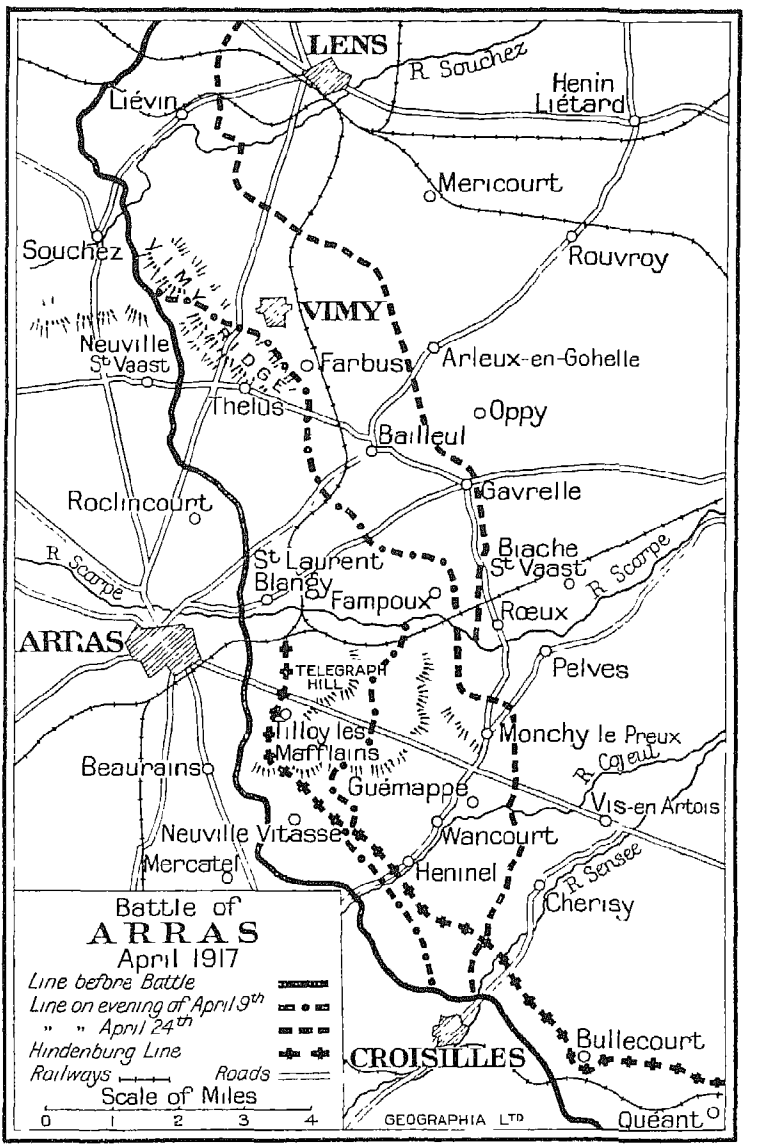
[1] In June dummy men and dummy tanks were used by the British near Lens; they were raised by ropes; they drew heavy fire and the Germans reported that they had killed a large number of infantry. See Haig's *Despatches*, I, 101. Many regimental officers thought that dummies of guns and men ought to have been used on a much larger scale than they were.

sergeant-major, looking critically at a shell-hole in one of the walls. "There's no roof on many of them."

"The horses do damage," said the Frenchman, pulling out a little notebook from his pocket.

I said that if a few more shells fell on the village, they would destroy our "damage" altogether, and added that it was necessary that our horses should not catch cold: if they caught cold, we should not be able to advance our guns.

What claim he made I never heard, for soon after this incident the order came to advance. One day while I was at the forward observation post I saw the smoke of many conflagrations rolling up behind the enemy's trenches; it seemed that they were laying waste the country and burning the houses behind them. When a raid was made by our infantry, it was found that the German trenches were deserted and their army was retreating towards the Hindenburg Line which at this point lay about a mile and a half to the rear. The gun-teams came up to our position, the guns were limbered up and the battery marched northwards to Arras to go into action in the old No Man's Land outside the town. It was dark and drizzling weather, and when we drew near to Arras our advancing troops were lit by the dazzling flashes from many batteries of heavy artillery which were lined up by the side of the road and fired over our heads at the retreating Germans. The roar of these heavy howitzers made it almost impossible to hear an order; their flashes lit up the steaming flanks of our horses and the fine lines of rain that fell on the glistening helmets of the drivers; but in spite of the drizzle and the pools of mud, the men were cheerful, there was a sense of adventure in the air,


LENS
R. Souchez
Henin Liétard
Liévin
Mericourt
Souchez
Rouvroy
VIMY RIDGE
VIMY
Neuville St Vaast
Farbus
Arleux-en-Gohelle
Thelus
Oppy
Bailleul
Gavrelle
Roclincourt
Biache St Vaast
St Laurent Blangy
R. Scarpe
Fampoux
Rœux
ARRAS
TELEGRAPH HILL
Pelves
Tilloy les Mofflaines
Monchy le Preux
R. Cojeul
Beaurains
Guémappe
Vis-en Artois
Neuville Vitasse
Wancourt
Mercatel
Heninel
R. Sensee
Cherisy
Battle of
ARRAS
April 1917
Line before Battle
Line on evening of April 9th
" " April 24th
Hindenburg Line
Railways
Roads
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4
GEOGRAPHIA LTD
CROISILLES
Bullecourt
Queant

and the pervasive hope of an advance seemed to fill the ranks of our long marching column.

I was ordered to go forward just before dawn as F.O.O. with an infantry battalion which was now entering into the old German positions. I had a few hours' sleep in a dugout in the old front line, and the sky was whitening, but dawn had not yet come, when I went forward with my signaller; it was a slow business finding our way in the dusk through the shell-holes and tangled wire of the old No Man's Land, and when the twilight came it brought slowly to view the bodies of French soldiers lying in tattered uniforms among the rusted stakes. Some of them were little more than skeletons; they looked as though they had lain there for years and it was clear that in this part of the line there had been no truce for burial. After crossing the German front line we came to their communication trench, but we had been warned not to go into it, as the Germans had left behind them a large number of booby traps, and bombs had been discovered laid under the duckboards.

As we walked outside the trench, the Germans dropped several heavy shells near the edge of it; but their fire was spasmodic and at this time they were probably withdrawing their artillery. The Colonel of the battalion was living in a little German shack built against a bank, and in front of the narrow doorway was a heavy British shell, which had failed to explode, standing erect on its base. When he asked me what he should do with it, I suggested that it should be left severely alone; there had already been many casualties through men trying to handle dud shells, which had a queer trick of shewing their vitality at exactly the wrong

moment. I had breakfast with some infantry subalterns in a German dugout; one of them told me that their cook had performed a remarkable feat on the Somme: during one of the attacks he went over the top carrying with him a large number of eggs, and when our men took the position, he made an omelette for the officers' mess in the German trenches. In the afternoon one of the subalterns was hit by a shell splinter while he was going round the outposts: his revolver was smashed in its holster and this probably saved his life. He was very severely wounded but shewed great delight at the prospect of seeing England long before he expected it.

During March there was a long period of waiting before we took up our positions for the battle. News quickly arrived that the Germans had evacuated the huge bulge in their line between Arras and Soissons, which was about seventy miles in breadth: in the centre of this salient they had fallen back for a distance of twenty-five miles, devastating the country and leaving a band of desert behind them; bridges had been blown up and railways destroyed, huge mine-craters gaped in the middle of the roads, orchards had been felled, the fruit trees, severed near the root, lay in rows neatly tilted onto their branches, and even the currant bushes in village gardens had not escaped attention. On this strand of deserted country they had left the print of their nature, the seal of ruthless efficiency, and also, here and there, signs of their chivalry. On the slope of a bank behind their reserve trenches I found twelve crosses, some of which supported the weather-worn helmets of French soldiers; a rough board in the centre bore the German inscription to their foes: "Here lie twelve soldiers of France who have died the *Heldentodt*."

Ludendorff's skilful retirement had made it necessary for Allenby, our great commander, to advance his heavy artillery: this and the prolonged period of our artillery preparation were causes of delay. For some weeks during March our battery was in action in the old No Man's Land among the tangle of iron stakes and rusted wire. During this time our heavy guns were pounding the Vimy Ridge on our left flank and we could see their shells driving up huge geysers of débris which spouted forth every few minutes from the skyline of Telegraph Hill. Steel helmets had been recently issued to British troops, but we found that the men were at first very reluctant to wear them. Though the battery was under heavy fire in its new position, their reluctance was so obvious that the Major gave them a brief lecture. I think the view of the average soldier was deeply tinged with fatalism: for each there might be waiting somewhere in the future a bullet or a splinter of steel, but if he were destined to meet it, he had a feeling that it would not be turned aside by a helmet or by anything known to man.

Our ammunition on the whole was good, but now and then some of our shrapnel exploded inside the guns and the bullets went out with a shrill grating screech from the muzzles. A story was told of a young subaltern standing some way in front of a battery, when one of these accidents happened; as a covey of bullets whistled past his head, he turned to a friend and observed with a pleasant smile: "I think that one must have been made by mother."

2

On a night early in April we marched to our battle

positions which lay about four miles South of Arras near the road to Henin. In front of us the Hindenburg Line with its broad strands of rusted wire stretched away to the South East towards Bullecourt and Quéant and about three miles behind it we could see Monchy le Preux lying on the higher ground and outlined against the sky the double line of poplars on the road that led there. We were ordered to discard all our spare kit and to reduce what was left to the smallest weight that was possible; we were told that Allenby hoped to break the line, and that if it were broken, we and other mobile brigades of light artillery must be ready to go through the gap. It was said that the cavalry were massing behind us, but the idea of using them, so long as any machine-guns survived, did not seem to offer much hope of success.

The front of attack was about 14 miles in width, between the Vimy Ridge and Croisilles. The Canadian Corps was on the left opposite the Vimy Ridge; on their right were the seventeenth and the sixth corps, and our own division formed part of the seventh corps, which was on the extreme right of the line. Allenby's objective was not only to capture the northern end of the Hindenburg Line, but to break the Drocourt-Quéant Switch Line which lay about five miles behind it, and was not yet fully completed.

During the five days of the preliminary bombardment we lived in a shack which the Germans had built near our battery position; the roof was covered with a layer of sandbags, but it was not a good example of German efficiency and there were many crevices through which the rain dribbled down on to the scanty relics of our kit. The number of British guns engaged in the battle was

nearly three thousand; during five days and nights the shells of the heavy artillery were passing over us from behind in an almost continuous stream and the din was so terrific that when men were off duty they found it extremely difficult to sleep. The length of the bombardment and the firing of a practice barrage before the battle were criticised by regimental officers; it seemed obvious that these methods gave the enemy a useful warning and made him a present of time in which to assemble his reserves. We know now that Allenby wanted a much shorter bombardment lasting for 48 hours, but G.H.Q. were in favour of caution rather than surprise.[1]

On one of these days when I was returning from the observation post, I found a covey of partridges sitting near the edge of a shell-hole. They seemed curiously tame and confiding, and it may be doubted whether they really minded this type of gunfire, which was now surrounding them with a tornado of sound; but though it was not aimed at them, it must often have hit them: a partridge killed by shrapnel was brought to our mess a few days before the battle by one of my brother officers, and was eaten with great ceremony.

Before the opening of the barrage our brigade was drawn up in the open, and the infantry were in a shallow trench not much more than a hundred yards in front of us. The usual practice in battle was for our brigade to provide five officers to go with the infantry, a liaison officer and four F.O.O.s. The duty of the F.O.O. was to signal targets and to keep up communication between the infantry and the guns; it was a difficult

[1] See *A History of the World War*, pp. 410, 411.

task as the field telephone wires laid by our signallers were often broken by shells, and the method of signalling by flag was not easy to work owing to the mist and smoke of action.

On the 9th of April, the first day of the battle, Friend, one of my brother subalterns, went forward with the infantry and on the second day I was to take his place. At 5.30 in the morning we opened our creeping barrage and at the same moment the infantry rose from their shallow trench a short way in front of us and moved steadily forward over the open grass; the ground over which they had to pass rose slightly at first and then sloped gently downwards towards the defences of the Hindenburg Line. Beyond the reports of our own battery, sharp and close at hand, the sky seemed to vibrate with continuous thunder, a stream of sound throbbing and pulsing behind and above, and on either side of us were long lines of flashes from our own guns, stretching from horizon to horizon. The guns themselves could not be seen; their flashes came through a veil of mist and smoke, and they seemed to have a hard gem-like quality, as though some giant hand had laid a string of diamonds across the face of the country and was shaking their facets in the light. In front our barrage was marching steadily forward, a wall of smoke, with its upper fringe flashing and sparkling with the glint of the bursting shells. Beyond it from the Hindenburg Line rose hundreds of golden rockets, the S. O. S. signals to the German guns, continuously rising and falling and lifting their brilliant shimmering trails high above the smoke. To the eye it was a magnificent spectacle, a scene of Aeschylean grandeur; and to the heart, whose friends were here

engaged, a tragedy deep and strange, whose scale was that of an epic, and Fate seemed to brood above it.

In answer to the S O S the German heavy guns began firing at our batteries; splinters went whizzing past and now and then there was a clang as a hit was made on one of our gun-shields. But their shooting was not so good as usual; in our own battery though some of the guns were hit with splinters, none were put out of action. Later in the day we heard that St. Martin-sur-Cojeul had been taken by men of our own division; good news began to come in from the left wing of the battle, where the Canadians had captured a large part of the Vimy Ridge; and Fampoux also had been taken together with many prisoners and guns. But South of Arras the German resistance had been more stubborn, especially on the line between Wancourt and Feuchy; and on the high ground Monchy-le-Preux still held out. We were greatly relieved to hear that Friend, our F.O.O., had not been hit; he reported that the infantry battalion after an advance of more than a mile was now in a sunken road, and was held up by the fire from machine guns.

Next morning, before sunrise, I went forward with my signaller to join the infantry; we crossed the shallow trench which they had left the morning before and passed over the wide stretch of hummocky grass over which they had made their advance. In front of us we could hear the spasmodic chattering of the German machine guns, and as dawn came, shells from the German heavy artillery began to burst round us with a deep grunting roar. A sickly daylight came down through the yellowish mist of the battle which still hung over the field and the ground was powdered with a thin layer

of snow; there were no living men in sight, but on our path and on either side of us were many groups of our dead. Some had been killed by heavy shells and some by machine guns firing through the barrage. The high explosive had smashed their helmets and in one place a rifle had been hurled through the air for nearly a hundred yards with its barrel bent into a bow as though it were a tube of lead.

As we drew near to the sunken road where our infantry were hidden from view, there was less shell-fire but a great number of bullets. Behind a bank in a small dip in the ground I found three wounded Germans sheltering from their own fire: two of them rose to their feet and one held his unwounded arm above his head: "Do not shoot", he said. "We come from Schleswig". I answered that the British did not shoot wounded men, and at this he seemed greatly relieved. Two of them could walk, but they did not want to leave their comrade who was badly wounded in the leg. I told them where the dressing-station was, but it was a long way back, and I thought they would be wiser to stay where they were; in the open there was a strong chance of their being hit by their own machine guns which were now raking the slope.

After about twenty minutes I reached the position of the infantry battalion; they were lined up against the further bank of a lane and in the middle of it lay the bodies of some dead Germans. Our total advance here had been about a mile and a quarter or perhaps a mile and a half. Friend told me that he had been trying to spot the positions of the machine guns which were holding us up, but as a rule they can only be located by sound, and in the mingled din of a battle this is a

very difficult task. I went with one of the infantry officers further up the hill and we lay down with our chests against the bank and our heads just above it trying to find the machine guns; some of them were in the direction of Wancourt but those which were causing most trouble were firing at close range from a strong point just in front of us and bullets came whizzing over us in great numbers. This German post was known as "The Egg", and I spent most of the day directing our fire at it and searching the trenches behind it with shrapnel.

In the afternoon the German fire began to slacken. Suddenly, without any warning, away to our left and then on our own front the Germans rose from their trenches and began to surrender: at first two or three grey figures seemed to emerge from the earth, then tens, and then hundreds, and they came pacing slowly towards us over the thin powdery snow. Some of our walking wounded began to go back over the field; our men in the lane, suddenly released from their tension, rested on their rifles, and an officer near me lit a cigarette. In the road behind us, a few yards away, lay the bodies of two young Germans looking up at the sky.

When I returned to the battery news was coming in from other parts of the front: it was clear already that this battle had been up to that time the greatest British success of the War. By the evening of the 11th of April Monchy-le-Preux had fallen and Allenby's troops had captured about 12,000 prisoners, 150 guns and more than three miles of the Hindenburg Line. Early on the morning of the 11th our guns were limbered up and we waited for some time in the open. We expected to

advance towards the east, but orders came to march southwards, and towards the end of April and in the beginning of May we were engaged in further attacks on the Hindenburg Line to the North of Croisilles. Nivelle's offensive on the Aisne on the 16th of April had met with disaster and our renewed attacks on the German fortress were ordered by Haig in order to relieve the pressure on our allies.

For some weeks after the battle of Arras our troops suffered many hardships. We slept in the open in heavy squalls of sleet and rain, and we often woke up in the morning lying in pools of slush; behind our battle positions the narrow country roads in this devastated area were congested with the advance of our army; owing to the inadequacy of the roads and the rotten condition of those which existed, transport arrangements broke down, and for many days we were without any bread and lived on iron rations. But in spite of the congestion and the many perplexities of the journey the mail continued to arrive with amazing punctuality; though we could not get bread, we received our letters, and with them one day a magnificent bottle of brandied cherries which had been sent me by a friend in a moment of inspiration which earned lasting gratitude. One day when our guns were on a slope above the Hindenburg Line, the mail brought with it a tragedy: my groom rode up to the position on my favourite horse with the bag bulging over his arm and I was about to take the letters from him when my horse was hit in the shoulder by a shrapnel bullet and the wound was so severe that he had to be shot.

Soon after our march southwards I got a very good view of the Hindenburg Line from the high ground

north of Croisilles. Our observation post here was a shell-hole in a field of roots near the crest of a low slope and one of my clearest memories is the view of this great siege-line as we looked down on it from above at fairly close range. At the first glance it seemed like a huge serpent uncoiled beneath us stretching across the face of the country, but a closer inspection shewed that it was a snake with a very queer pattern on its skin; in front of the deep intricate system of trenches was a broad band of wire entanglements, a deep red fringe covering many acres of country, curving over the fields and blotting out the green of the grass. When we first reached the crest of the hill we could see some little grey figures moving about in the trenches beneath us. The German guns soon began searching behind the crest for our batteries and we replied by firing at targets in the Hindenburg Line; but here they had a definite advantage, for the eighteen-pounder, though an excellent weapon in the open, was not of much avail against the concrete "pill boxes," with which the line was fortified.

The process on which the British Army was now engaged has been described as "gorging the snake from the head downwards": after the battle of the 23rd and 24th of April we had captured altogether about seven miles of the northern end of it, but this serpent with its bones of concrete, its million stings and its vast skirt of rusted wire was not a morsel easy to digest. In this battle the British took 3,000 German prisoners, and captured Guemappe and the high ground overlooking Fontaine-lez-Croisilles. On the 3rd of May nearly a thousand prisoners were taken, but our losses in both battles were severe. On our own sector we

were greatly helped by the tanks, which made avenues in the wire by rolling it neatly down into the surface of the turf.

Towards the end of these operations our observation post was a concrete German pill box inside the Hindenburg Line, lying close to the part of it which was still held by the Germans. This blockhouse had two stories and also a hole in the wall through which we could see; its neighbourhood was infested by every variety of missile including that most offensive visitor the heavy trench-mortar bomb, which was known as the "flying pig". Numbers of dead lay for days on every side of our pill box, the stench was appalling, the scene bore every sign of the coarse destructive monotony of siege warfare and it will scarcely bear description. On my way back from this post I now and then went down into the famous tunnel beneath the line: it was reached here by an opening in the side of the trench and a long flight of steps, and the air beneath was dank and foul, but the immense thickness of the roof made it secure against any shell known to man.

We lost some very fine men in this fighting and my brother subaltern, Cairns, a most delightful friend, was killed in action. I had been on duty at the observation post during the morning and he was due to relieve me in the afternoon. This post was on the high ground looking out over the Hindenburg Line, and when the time came for the relief he arrived punctually to the minute in the highest possible spirits. We talked for a short time and then I went back to the battery; it was not more than ten minutes' walk, but when I reached

the guns, I heard that my friend had been killed. For those who had been his companions during these months his loss left a gap that was most deeply felt. As so often happened, I had never met him in ordinary conditions of life, for since the beginning of February—except for a few hours of marching—we had been continuously in action. He never intruded his cheerfulness on others, but in the most depressing surroundings it was always present in the background. He was a man of crystal nature and it was impossible to be in his presence for more than a few minutes without being conscious of his great courage and radiant goodness of heart.

3

In July and August 1917 our brigade took part in the first phase of the great battle in Flanders and returned to it in November when it was at last thundering to its close. It has been well said that the series of actions known as " Passchendaele " was a campaign rather than a battle : it took its name from the site of a village, the mounds of crumbled bricks which our line reached at last after an advance of four miles and a half in three months of fighting at a cost of life which far exceeded that of any previous action fought by the British Army. To describe in detail those phases of the battle in which we took part would be a task of grim monotony, and I shall confine myself to a few impressions, which may, here and there, give a glimpse of the conditions under which our troops were fighting.

Few operations have been more strongly criticised :

most of these criticisms are familiar, but a few of them may be briefly referred to here. One of the main objections was the nature of the ground in the sector chosen for the attack: the experience of the Germans in many earlier battles had already shown its difficulties, and these were likely to be greatly increased by the destruction of the drainage system of the land in our preliminary bombardment. More depended here on the luck of the weather than in other parts of the line; rain might well be expected in the later part of August, and the dissolution of the land into mud as the combined result of rain and the destruction of drainage might easily prove fatal to movement. It was on this issue that Foch is said to have made his famous comment that the British were making a "duck's march": "*Boche* is bad and *boue* is bad; but *Boche* and *boue* together——!" Ground in this state was clearly not favourable for the use of tanks which were now beginning to play a leading part in British tactics.

Another criticism was the want of surprise in the attack. The British preparations during June and July were on a huge scale; they took a long period to complete and they were well known to the Germans who had ample time in which to mass their reserves and prepare their ingenious system of "defence in depth." Their central idea was to expose as few men as possible to the intense fire of the attack: their positions were defended not by regular trench-lines but by isolated posts, small groups of men armed with machine guns and protected by the strong walls of concrete blockhouses.

A further criticism made against Haig was that even if he were right in attacking on this sector, he ought to have broken off the operations long before he did owing

to the condition of the ground and the enormous number of casualties.

Two main arguments have been put forward in his defence; the first is the defective state of the French Army, which had at last shown signs of failing after three years of gallant resistance; the second was Jellicoe's opinion that owing to the submarine campaign the War could not go on unless the Belgian ports were captured. Ten years later, in a letter to General Charteris, Haig referred to Mr. Churchill's criticisms in *The World Crisis* and stated a secret part of his own case:

"It is impossible for Winston to know how the possibility of the French Army breaking up in 1917 *compelled me to go on attacking*. It was impossible to change sooner from the Ypres front to Cambrai without Pétain coming to press me not to leave the Germans alone for a week on account of the *awful* state of the French troops! You even did not know the facts, as Pétain told them to me in confidence."[1]

These arguments however do not apply with equal force to the later stages of the battle, when the state of the French Army had been greatly improved and the submarine crisis was no longer so dangerous a menace.

* * * * * *

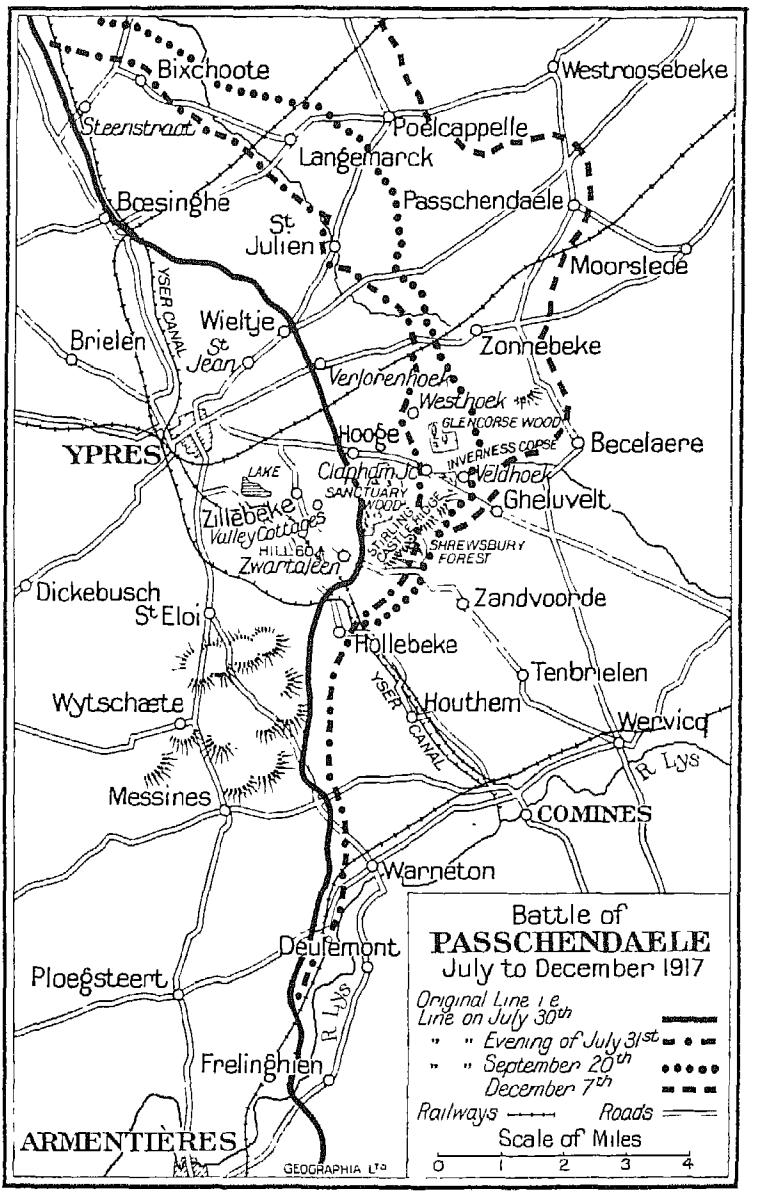
The German blockhouses in Flanders, which we knew as "pill boxes," were very similar in structure to those we had found in the section of the Hindenburg Line which was captured when we were serving under Allenby in the battles of April and May. The largest type which I saw had two storeys; a little wooden ladder led up through a hole in the floor to the upper chamber and

[1] *Haig*, by Duff Cooper, II, 134.

there were narrow slits in the walls which could be used for firing machine guns or for observation by F.O.O.'s who were directing the fire of the artillery. They varied greatly in size; most of them only had one storey and their squat shapes crouching in the mud offered as small a target as possible to the guns.

After our advance during the first phase of Passchendaele I saw several pill boxes which had been split asunder by direct hits from heavy artillery, but they were able to resist the shells of light mobile guns like those in our own battery. One afternoon when I was acting as F.O.O. at an infantry post in a captured pill box, three direct hits were made on it by the German field guns: each of these impacts shook the roof above us with a dull crunching thud; as the structure vibrated, there were some ugly moments of suspense for those who were squatting inside, but none of the shells came through, and moments such as these were the rare occasions when we felt grateful for the efficiency of German engineers. One minor defect from our point of view was that the doorways of captured pill boxes were usually facing the enemy; another defect was that some of them were inhabited by lice: these creatures had been even more plentiful in the Hindenburg Line than they were in the Salient, and in capturing part of that fortress our troops had also taken many millions of unwelcome prisoners who had lately pastured on their enemies. I was told by a friend who had inspected one of these little animals at close quarters that it resembled "a small grey hippopotamus," but I never made the experiment of testing his description.

For many weeks before the opening of the battle of Passchendaele our observation post was in a trench


Bixchoote
Westroosebeke
Steenstraat
Poelcappelle
Langemarck
Bœsinghe
Passchendaele
St. Julien
Moorslede
YSER CANAL
Wieltje
St. Jean
Brielen
Zonnebeke
Verlorenhoek
Westhoek
GLENCORSE WOOD
INVERNESS COPSE
Hooge
YPRES
Becelaere
LAKE
Clapham Jct
SANCTUARY WOOD
Veldhoek
Zillebeke
Valley Cottages
HILL 60
Gheluvelt
SHREWSBURY FOREST
Zwartaleen
Dickebusch
St. Eloi
Zandvoorde
Hollebeke
Tenbrielen
Wytschaete
Houthem
Wervicq
R. Lys
Messines
COMINES
Warneton
Deulemont
Ploegsteert
Frelinghien
ARMENTIÈRES
Battle of
PASSCHENDAELE
July to December 1917
Original Line i.e. Line on July 30th
" " Evening of July 31st
" " September 20th
December 7th
Railways
Roads
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4
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between Hooge and Hill 60 in the eastern bulge of the Salient. It was surrounded by the sites of places with famous and ominous names many of which could scarcely be recognised by the eye as representing anything at all except a mound of rubble or a congregation of shell-craters lying lip to lip: a short way to the north the remains of the Menin road passed through the site of Hooge and crossed No Man's Land on its way over the ridge to Gheluvelt; Hooge itself and "Valley Cottages," a short way to the south-west of it, were still shown on our maps but they had been completely erased from the landscape; they were nothing now but words from the past. To the east at a very short range the view was blocked by the ridge of Stirling Castle which was held by the enemy; it was only a little more than 60 metres in height, but in this flat country such an advantage was of the highest value, as they could see the flashes of our guns and discover their positions, whilst their own were hidden from view.

About a hundred and fifty yards in front of our observation post lay "Sanctuary Wood," one of the most ironic terms in the Salient: it was a wood in nothing but name and a sanctuary in no sense known to man; in other days it had covered the western slope of the Stirling Castle ridge, but now there was no bird to be seen there nor any living tree; for nearly three years it had been the centre of many tempests of fire, and now it was a place of gaping craters, scattered with powdered and pounded earth, and here and there a blackened stump or a grey riven bole lifted up a twisted arm to the sky. The German front line ran through this wood and there were several pill boxes near the crest. In this forward area there were many bursts of

machine gun fire, but the shell-fire during weeks of preparation was far more severe in the neighbourhood of the batteries as the Germans could see our flashes and were trying to destroy our guns before the battle began.

Soon after our arrival in Flanders I was transferred to another battery of eighteen-pounders which had had heavy losses in the fighting near Arras. The number of officers in a field battery was a major, a captain, and usually four subalterns, six in all—about the size of an average family: in marches behind the line this was a pleasant number for a mess, but in 1917 the guns were almost continuously in action and owing to the variety of their duties it was rare for more than three or four officers to meet at the same time round the little table in the dugout. Our battery commander, Major MacFarlane, was a regular soldier of exceptional qualities and a most charming companion: we were to learn in the open warfare of 1918 his swift instinct for choosing positions, his great powers of endurance, and his almost uncanny intuitions as to the movements of the enemy. He presided over a family which would have been extremely happy, if Fate had allowed it, but at the battle of Passchendaele such a gift could scarcely be expected: our battery like many others had serious losses and of the three subalterns I came to know in June only one was left at the end of the battle.

On the 7th of June Plumer and his tunnellers had captured the ridge of Messines by the surprise explosion of nineteen mines, and this success had improved the situation on the southern flank of the Salient; but the advanced positions of our field artillery were still exposed to heavy enfilade fire: it was as though a batsman were defending his wicket against many bowlers at once, and

these delivered their balls not only from the opposing wicket, but sometimes from mid-on and very frequently from point or cover. In the field artillery the casualties among men, horses and guns were extremely heavy before the battle began.

In July we worked by night on an advanced position for the battle at Valley Cottages which lay in the eastern bulge of the Salient about 1200 yards from the German line. During this period four of the six guns in our battery were hit and put out of action; their injuries were mainly caused by shell splinters striking the recoil mechanism, which was placed in a vulnerable position above the muzzles, but we replaced these guns by others which we brought up by night. One of the batteries on our left suffered even more severely: its ammunition was blown up and little remained of the battery or its position except four gaping chasms in the ground.

During these weeks of preparation one of the hardest problems was that of carrying up our ammunition to the forward position. For more than five miles behind us the roads were torn by fire and a continuous area of shell-craters spread out on either side of them: horses and guns could only cross the crater field by wooden tracks which were laid down above the morasses; these tracks were easy to photograph and their course was well known to the German gunners who bombarded them with gas and high explosive during the hours of darkness, when the long trains of horses were moving up to the guns each with a load of shells slung over his back.

The time came when gas masks were fitted on our horses and mules: we were doubtful at first whether they would consent to wear this new form of head-

gear, but some of them thrust their noses into the masks with an eager whinny in the hope that they were filled with oats. The task of leading them forward over that long hazardous track on a night of inky blackness, unaided by any torch, was one of the most difficult duties that fell to an officer. There were certain well-known danger points, one of which was near the ruins of Zillebeke; but the bursts of fire often came at unusual places and irregular intervals, and owing to shell-holes on either side it was impossible to manœuvre the column away from the track. These journeys were grim reminders of the game of "Oranges and Lemons" which most of us had played in our childhood. On many nights the baulks of timber that made the track were blown up in front of the advancing column; dead horses lay on either side of it, and the way was often obstructed by groups of animals which had just been killed lying with stiffened legs in the centre of the path. In many parts of this dismal and tragic journey the stench was appalling, and it was past sights such as these that our horses had to make their way night after night during the month before the battle.

Many of our horses were killed or wounded in this duty and one of my brother officers had two horses hit under him on the same evening: on another night the Germans opened a burst of rapid fire when we were just arriving at the forward position, a shell exploded near us and my own horse gave a faint shiver and lowered his head: to my great sorrow he was mortally wounded in the neck and I shot him with my revolver so as to put him out of his pain.

The duty of bringing up the ammunition usually fell to the captain, but it was sometimes discharged by

myself or one of the other subalterns after our occasional visits to the wagon line. During this period of preparation the infantry often called for the S O S barrage to be put down in front of them in order to ward off a raid. The signal for the S O S was a series of coloured flares, and the call usually came during the hours of darkness. As soon as we started firing it, the Germans usually replied by bombarding the battery with gas-shells, which could easily be detected by the low sinister whistle which they made while they passed through the air, a sound which together with their queer soft explosions clearly distinguished them from other projectiles; but they often mingled their gas-shells with high explosive, which had the effect of suppressing these warning notes in a greater volume of sound. We were sometimes bombarded with gas two or three times in a night; when we slept, we always kept our respirators close to our faces, ready to put on at an instant's notice, and we developed a curious alertness in awaking from the deepest slumber at the sound of that low sinister whistle.

During this preliminary period, the art of scenting gas became one of the chief needs of life, and we were lucky in possessing an officer with a good "gas nose," an epicure of a new order: when he was asked to test the air, he responded with great good humour, and if there were any traces of gas he was usually the first to scent them and to pronounce on the particular vintage to which it belonged. Our battery was in the first German bombardment with mustard gas and a large number of mustard-shells fell round our position; many of us had slight doses of this new invention, but thanks to our masks and the gas-curtains on the doors of our dugouts,

we did not have many serious casualties among our own men. At a later time several of them developed painful blains and blisters on their hands and on the tenderest parts of their bodies. It was thought by many that German science had found some ingenious method of dosing us with bacteria; but it was discovered later that these men had washed themselves in the slimy pools of the shell-holes, many of which had been infected by the contagion of the new poison, and this was the cause of their ailment.

The preliminary bombardment of the German positions began on the 22nd of July and lasted for ten days; the number of British guns in action was about three thousand, and it has been calculated that four and three-quarter tons of shells were thrown for every yard of the front.[1] The front of our attack was about eleven miles; the order of battle was two French divisions on the left, then nine divisions of Gough's army, and five of Plumer's on the right. Our own division (the 30th) was in the centre of the second corps which was fighting on the right wing just to the south of the Menin road. The infantry attacked at 3.50 a.m. behind a creeping barrage which was even denser than that at the battle of Arras. On the first day the advance was hampered by heavy rain, which made observation extremely difficult: the advance varied from one to two miles in depth, the Pilckem ridge was captured on the north, whilst our corps on the right wing fought their way forward through Shrewsbury Forest and Sanctuary Wood and captured Hooge and the Stirling Castle ridge. This was an important success, as it drove back the Germans from their posts of observation on the crest. Our troops

[1] See *A History of the World War* by Liddell Hart, p. 429.

were held up after they had captured "Clapham Junction," which lay on the Menin road about two thousand yards east of Hooge and this post now lay in our new front line; it was the highest point on the ridge and we ran out a telephone wire to it and used it as an observation post for directing the fire of our battery.

My turn to be F.O.O. came on the third day of the battle; it had been raining heavily and even on the higher ground the soil was in a very swampy condition. The first part of the way lay over the old No Man's Land and then came a strange walk up the pounded crater-slope of Sanctuary Wood whose soil was poisoned with gas. A few German and British dead lay among the stumps of the trees, but it was clear that the Germans had kept very few troops in this forward area. Near the top of the wood were several pill boxes one of which had been riven and shattered by a direct hit from our heavy guns. I looked back from the slope at the flashes of hundreds of British guns sparkling out in the Salient beneath us and it was clear that so long as the Germans were holding this post of vantage they could have had little difficulty in spotting our batteries. As we reached the crest of the ridge we were greeted by heavy fire from German field guns, but some of their shells burst badly as their explosions were muffled by mud. In front of us near the Menin road two of our tanks, that had taken part in the attack, had been hit by field guns and lay foundered in their tracks pressing their weight into the crater field. They made good cover from machine guns, which at this point was badly needed, and passing behind them we dropped into the battered trench that led to Clapham Junction.

The importance of this outpost was exaggerated by

articles in the press at home, and it was certainly not so near to Waterloo as its original namesake. Though it was the highest point, it was only raised above the surrounding land by a few metres and it did not give us a view of the German positions in the valley beyond. The main importance of the advance at this point was that we had denied observation to the Germans and not that we had gained it ourselves; but the view was more extensive than that from the trench, which we had used before the battle, when the prospect had been completely blocked out by the ridge in front of us. From Clapham Junction we looked out to the left on to the shattered trees of Glencorse Wood, Inverness copse was on the right, and directly in front of us was the crater field made by our own guns.

During the fighting in August I spent many days at this outpost as F.O.O. with the infantry. An infantry subaltern told me that his men had been troubled by snipers and at his request we fired shrapnel at suspected sniping nests among the shattered trees in front of us. As the highest point in the neighbourhood, Clapham Junction received a full share of attention, not only from snipers and machine guns, but also from the German artillery, and one day, when I was on duty there, we were attacked by an aeroplane which flew down the trench-line at a height of about a hundred feet firing at us with its machine gun; it had the appearance of a hawk, but it came as suddenly as a driven partridge flying low over a fence; though there were a number of men in the trench, not a single man was touched—a good instance of the difficulty of hitting a target, however stationary, from a rapidly moving machine.

In September we took up a position on the Messines

Ridge and in October we were in action a few miles to the north of it. In these positions on the southern fringe of the Salient we were outside the main battle, but there were many duels of guns, and we had several lively days and nights when our battery was bombarded with gas.

Our observation post was on the edge of No Man's Land which at this point was fairly wide, about two hundred yards across: it gave a wide view of the land far behind the German lines and the smoke of their railway trains could often be seen trailing across the open country. In this strip of No Man's Land I never saw a bird, but there were large numbers of mice in the trench and they were surprisingly tame: two of them often came out of a crevice between the sandbags in order to share my luncheon and their habit was one of great punctuality.

When I was on duty at this post I was the witness of a very mysterious incident: one afternoon in full daylight two German officers rose from their trench in front of us, made their way through their own wire and walked towards us, moving straight for the British line: they came on at a leisurely pace in a very trustful manner as though they had complete confidence that they would not be fired at. I thought at first that they might be coming to arrange a short armistice for burial of the dead and had forgotten to bring a white flag, or that possibly they meant to bring in a wounded man; I think the officer in the infantry post which was a few yards away had come to the same conclusion: not a single shot was fired at them, but when they were about eighty yards from our wire, they suddenly dropped into a shell-crater where they were completely hidden

from view. It may be that a wounded man was lying in the crater, it is possible also that their action was the result of a bet: with machine guns in front the chances were strongly against them, but I record it as the only incident of the kind I ever saw, though its solution is still a mystery.

In November, when Passchendaele was rumbling to its close, we again took up our position in the Salient on the right wing of the battle near Sanctuary Wood. The ruined site of Passchendaele village which lay about five miles to the north was captured by the Canadians during the first week in the month, and a few days later, on the 10th of November, the last attack was made, which strengthened the British position on the ridge. On the right wing after three months of fighting our line had been advanced along the Menin road to a point which lay about two thousand yards to the east of Clapham Junction. Our new observation post was a German pill box with two storeys, whose grey squat tower rose as a prominent target above the foul swamp of the crater field to the east of Inverness Copse. The slimy ridges between the craters had in many places been pounded away by months of bombardment; they were filled with ponds of torpid and filthy water, tinged by the chemicals of shells that had burst there with strange turgid clouds of blue and green and yellow; in some places the surface of the stagnant ooze was crimsoned with blood and floating near the banks of the pools were some of the most horrible relics of battle.

The state of the ground had been very bad after the rains in August; it became worse in October, and in November the heavy bombardments did nothing to improve

its condition. My own observation applies only to that small but vital sector where the torn relics of the Menin road crossed the ridge between Hooge and Gheluvelt, but there is ample evidence that similar and sometimes even worse conditions prevailed in other parts of the battlefield: Haig himself has described them in his despatches: "The valleys of the choked and overflowing streams were speedily transformed into long stretches of bog, impassable except by a few well-defined tracks, which became marks for the enemy's artillery. To leave these tracks was to risk death by drowning, and in the course of the subsequent fighting on several occasions both men and pack animals were lost in this way."[1]

Ludendorff bears witness to the conditions in the lines of our gallant enemies: "Enormous masses of ammunition, such as the human mind had never imagined before the War, were hurled upon the bodies of men who passed a miserable existence scattered about in mud-filled shell holes. The horror of the shell holes of Verdun was surpassed. It was no longer life at all. It was mere unspeakable suffering. And through this world of mud the attackers dragged themselves, slowly but steadily and in dense masses. Caught in the advanced zone by our hail of fire they often collapsed and the lonely man in the shell hole breathed again. Then the mass came on again. Rifle and machine gun jammed with mud. Man fought against men, and only too often the mass was successful."[2]

Though the last big attack was made on the 10th of November, there was no sudden dying of the storm:

[1] Sir Douglas Haig's *Despatches*, p. 116.
[2] *My War Memories* by Ludendorff, II, 488.

for several weeks the guns and machine guns of both sides were extremely alert and active and I rarely went to the observation post without seeing fresh casualties lying by the side of the narrow duck-board track that led there. The Germans made very accurate shooting at the duck-boards, and where they had been blown to pieces, it was no simple task making a way over the slimy arêtes of the crater field. It would be difficult to exaggerate the hardships of the infantry near our observation post, who sometimes had to lie out all night under heavy fire without any cover except the lips of the poisonous shell-holes. The horse lines, some miles behind us, were bombed at night, often for many hours on end and there were many casualties among the horses: in one battery over fifty horses were hit in a single night, and parapets of sandbags were built round the lines to protect them from splinters. It was clear that a deadlock had been reached, but in the crater field the casualties were steadily mounting day by day.

In our own battery two of the four subalterns had been lost earlier in the year, one killed and one wounded, and in this battle two more were hit, whose loss we felt most deeply: Herbert was very severely wounded during the artillery duel at the beginning of the battle, and Oxley was killed during this last phase when the Germans made a direct hit on our observation post. When the Major and I reached the post on that day, we found that a heavy shell had shattered the concrete wall of the pill box and that one of two dead officers who lay inside, was our gay and gallant friend to whom we were much devoted. His signaller had been badly wounded with splinters of concrete, but by a miracle of chance he had survived the explosion. As we walked

back that evening over the remains of the Menin road I reflected on other friends who had fallen there three years before, how short a way we had come since then, and at what a cost the journey had been made. The conditions I have hinted at will scarcely bear a full description; they had their counterpart in the amazing endurance of the troops, and men looked forward to the future with a grim sense of stoical fatalism. In years to come the ominous name of this battle may well serve as a symbol not only of some of the worst aspects of war, but also perhaps—for some who survive—of a core of resolution in the heart of the armies whose strength almost exceeded belief.

* * * * * *

As winter drew on to Christmas, cakes of ice clouded with strange and sinister colours began to form over the pools in the shell craters; the air was cleaner now and it was less difficult to make a way between the gaping holes and morasses over ridges of mud which were hardened by the frost. One day a figure in a strange uniform accompanied by an A.D.C. was seen approaching our guns by the narrow duck-board track: he was an American officer of high rank and great courtesy, and he had only lately come to France; he had never before seen the conditions under which we were fighting, and as he approached our dugout he looked round at the crater field, which had so long been our familiar home, with an expression of almost comic bewilderment which he made no effort to hide.

Christmas was drawing near; at the end of the long battle came the season of peace on earth which was soon to be followed by another spring offensive

carried out on a vaster scale than had ever been known before. The Major asked what the men would like for their Christmas dinner: we had expected that they would choose either geese or turkeys, but we were completely wrong: our sergeant-major reported that there was a very strong feeling in favour of sucking-pigs, and a party was sent out from the wagon line to search the farms of Flanders for a sufficient supply of these delectable animals.

Towards the end of December I went on leave to England; I rode back to the railhead with my groom and with five other officers climbed into an ancient carriage; the varied scents of Flanders were floating through the gaping holes in its windows whose glass had been shattered to splinters, and the upholstery of its seats was in an advanced stage of decay; while we bumped along towards the coast at a pace of about ten miles an hour, we did not talk much about the battle, but on those mildewed and bedraggled seats we seemed to be sitting in Paradise.

As the leave train left Folkestone a crowd of children waved Union Jacks and on our way to London more flags than usual fluttered from the windows and gardens of the little houses that flanked the line; in London, I caught a train that was going to the West of England, where my wife and family were living, and before dawn the next morning I was driving along a Devonshire valley with a misted stream whispering below and the vague shapes of starlit woods hanging above it. Leave always brought with it a sudden change of plane, a violent need for adjustment, but this journey in a few hours from Passchendaele to Devonshire was the most startling change I remember.

Chapter XVIII

THE BATTLE IN THE MIST

I

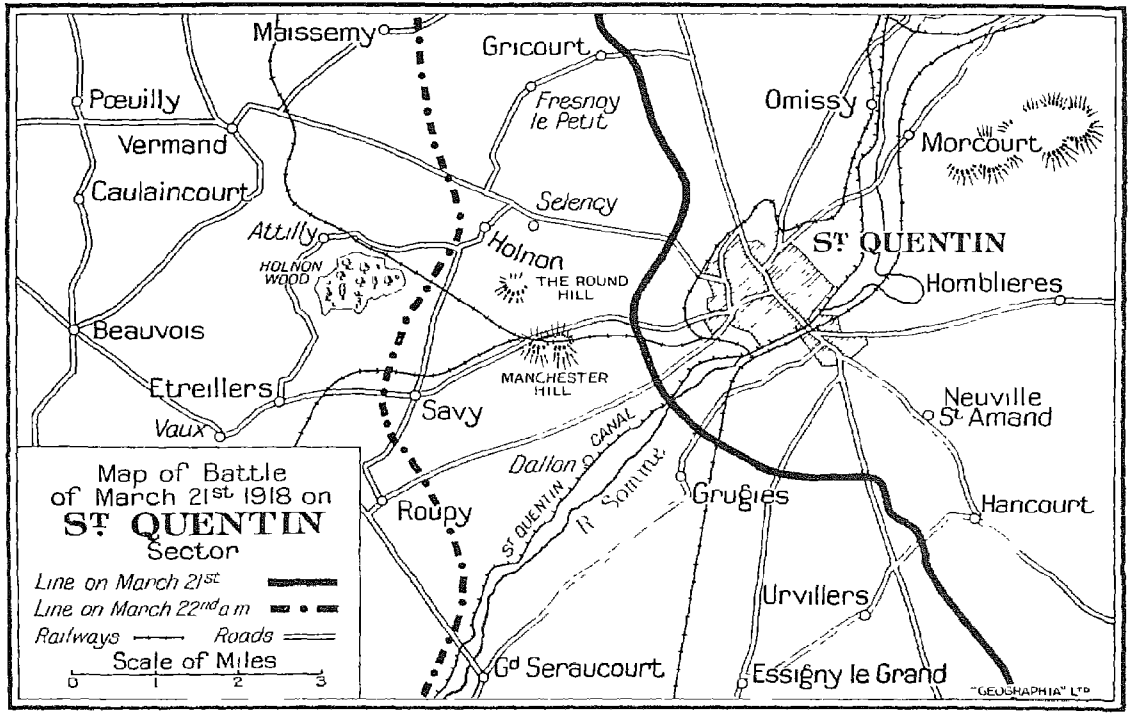
I returned from leave in January, 1918 and rejoined my battery while it was marching southward from Ypres to St. Quentin, a sector which we were taking over from the French. Our road led for a large part of the way between long ranks of poplars, near small burbling streams and past the rushes and osiers of the broad watermeads of the Somme; at the end of each day we found good billets for the men in barns and steadings, and the farmers' wives seemed to welcome our invasion, supplying us with coffee, ducks, chickens, and excellent omelettes.

A few days before we went up to our new positions, Haig came to review our division which was drawn up in line in a valley, the guns and their teams in close order on the right, the infantry on the left, making rather a grim array, as they looked to their front beneath the brims of their steel helmets. On the crest of a small hill Haig suddenly rode into view on his charger and halted for a short time on the sky-line to acknowledge our salute: he might almost have been mistaken for a figure of bronze, as he sat motionless on his horse, outlined against a grey wintry cloud, looking down on this division that had fought in so many of his battles, and was now far beneath its proper strength. Another

incident of those days was a very spirited game of Rugby football between two of our brigades which was played in a field a few miles behind the line; in the middle of the match a high-flying German aeroplane passed over the ground and after its glimpse between the clouds may well have carried back to its friends the news of this strange prelude to an action. In describing the events that followed, I have been able to help my memory by a diary which I wrote a few days after they happened: it records the impressions of a junior officer in a small unit, and these are mainly concerned with only one sector in a vast panorama.

The German line at St. Quentin formed a bulge jutting out in front of the town. Our division was in the centre of the eighteenth Corps; it was part of General Gough's Fifth Army and covered the western part of the salient between the villages of Holnon and Savy; the 61st was on our left, and the 36th on our right. To the right of the 36th the divisions of the third Corps held the extreme right flank of the army and extended southwards to Barisis where the French line began.

We expected that if the main attack were launched at St. Quentin, it would be made with forces far greater than our own, and that the element of surprise which had proved so effective at Riga and elsewhere on the Eastern Front, would be put to the fullest possible use. To meet this threat with greatly inferior numbers the system adopted by the Higher Command was known as 'defence in depth.' Behind our forward wire entanglements was a deep 'Outpost Zone,' which was not held by a regular system of trenches, but by a series of separate redoubts; behind this was another area known as the 'Battle Zone' with wire entanglements of its own, and


Maissemy
Gricourt
Pœuilly
Fresnoy le Petit
Omissy
Vermand
Morcourt
Caulaincourt
Selency
Attilly
Holnon
ST QUENTIN
HOLNON WOOD
THE ROUND HILL
Homblieres
Beauvois
MANCHESTER HILL
Etreillers
Savy
Neuville St Amand
Vaux
Dallon Canal
St Quentin Canal
R Somme
Grugies
Hancourt
Roupy
Urvillers
Gd Seraucourt
Essigny le Grand
"GEOGRAPHIA" LTD
Map of Battle of March 21st 1918 on ST QUENTIN Sector
Line on March 21st
Line on March 22nd a m
Railways
Roads
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3

here it was intended to fight the main engagement. The idea of the defence was that of a buffer which would gradually take the weight of the impact rather than that of a rigid barrier which might break before it—a chain rather than an iron bar.

Our battery was hidden in the eastern fringe of the Holnon Wood, the forward edge of the Battle Zone, and we advanced one of our guns to a position near the infantry outpost where it could get a good field of fire against an attack by tanks. One day, when I was off duty, I explored part of the Battle Zone, passing on my way through an orchard of cherry trees that had been laid waste by the Germans during their retreat in 1917; the bole of every tree had been sawn through a few inches from the ground, and they were all tipped over neatly on their sides, each facing in the same direction; the stamp of Teutonic method lay on the ruin. Near the front of the Battle Zone was a large tomb which looked like a family vault; the stone coping had been shattered by a heavy shell, and looking down through the gap into the gloom below I saw that the living had taken cover with the dead: the vault had been used as a dugout by the French; they had left behind them an old mess-tin and some scattered playing-cards, and mingled with these, the photograph of an actress smiled up at us vacuously from the floor of the tomb. The scene was typical of that strangely twisted world in which we lived.

As late as the 20th of March the trenches of the Battle Zone had not been finished, and in many places near our battery they were not more than three or four feet in depth. Our observation post was in the forward fringe of the Outpost Zone, on the eastern slope of Manchester

Hill, and looked out straight on to No Man's Land. The subalterns of our battery went to this post in rotation, and I spent many days and nights there during February and the first three weeks of March. Looking down the hill, there was an excellent view of the city of St. Quentin which lay at the bottom of the slope with its cathedral tower rising above it, as a rule, absolutely silent, with a weird and sinister appearance of complete desertion, a town of the dead, with no single wisp of smoke rising from its thousands of chimneys.

From this observation post we ranged our guns by telephone: after a short discussion as to which was the ugliest house in view we chose a new and garish villa as our target, and succeeded in hitting it with the third round. After we had ranged six guns on this villa, the roof was blown to pieces and a pathetic piece of furniture that looked like a four-post bed, protruded through a jagged gap between the shattered windows. But when we ceased fire, not a single gun replied: the explosions of our own shells seemed to emphasise the wide silence of the town, and now, when they were no longer heard, the stillness seemed deeper, more oppressive than before.

The infantry redoubt was the 'Brown Quarry' which was near the top of Manchester Hill, and it was obvious to all that if the attack were made at St. Quentin, this isolated post, strong though it was, would have little chance of surviving with the main flood of the assault rolling round it on either side. One day in March when I was acting as F.O.O. at this redoubt, the Germans suddenly broke their rule of silence: in the early hours of the morning we heard the low whistle of gas-shells coming down through the darkness; they burst in

great numbers on either side of the Quarry with soft sputtering sounds, disgusting to the ear, and they were swiftly followed by a heavy bombardment with high explosive. I telephoned to the artillery and in less than a minute they were firing the S O S. We were doubtful for some time whether this was the beginning of the real attack, but after about half an hour the German bombardment ceased as suddenly as it had begun. It was one of the few signs of activity during the weeks before the battle, an obscure and perplexing incident, which did not seem to fit in with their general scheme of silent preparation.

On the whole the Germans were over-acting their part, and officers of experience, who knew the conditions in many other parts of the line, could scarcely fail to feel suspicion at their long silence. Beyond this there were other grounds for distrust: small blue balloons now and then floated over No Man's Land, apparently to test the direction of the wind, and at night the dim rumbling of traffic could be heard in the streets of St. Quentin. On the 20th of March intelligence reports were sent up to the battery from headquarters, which strengthened our suspicions almost to the point of certainty: there had lately been a great increase in the number of German wireless messages, but the most important piece of news was that a prisoner, who had been captured in a raid on the 18th, stated definitely that the Germans meant to attack on the morning of the 21st.

On the afternoon of the 20th I went forward to warn Harris, one of my brother officers, who was on duty at the observation post, of the latest news. Everything had an appearance of peace: the only sign of bloodshed

was a dead hare which an infantryman had shot with his rifle and was carrying in from the edge of No Man's Land. In the German lines and behind them there was no single human being in view, though at that moment fourteen German divisions were assembling to attack the three divisions of our own Corps, and an overwhelming force of artillery was lying hidden and silent in the placid landscape in front of us. We now know that the proportion on the whole front of the Fifth Army was fourteen of our own infantry divisions against forty-three of the enemy.

At the battery we called up the gunners, and told them to have their gas-gloves ready and to apply "undimming mixture" to the goggles of their respirators. We heard late in the evening that a raid had been made and that prisoners belonging to many different units had been captured on a small section of our own front; we also got orders that all secret documents in our possession were to be destroyed immediately.

The Captain and I made a fire of cherry-wood gathered from the prostrate trees of the orchard: we lit it in the corner of the dugout so as to hide it from view and piled on the top of the blaze a mass of papers that had come up from headquarters, until the air was filled with the delightful scent of burning cherry-wood mingled with the acrid aroma of the divisional defence scheme, which was now crumpling up and dissolving in ashes before our eyes. We were both on duty at the battery, and at two in the morning we opened bursts of rapid fire on the German positions and continued them at short intervals through the early hours in order to harass them, while they were assembling for the attack.

2

About 4.40 in the morning of the 21st, while we were still continuing our bursts of fire, the Germans suddenly broke their long silence by opening a bombardment of terrific violence; their fire extended over the front of the British armies for a distance of more than forty miles and the number of German guns in action was about six thousand five hundred, of which a large proportion was heavy artillery.[1] It has been recorded by historians that in grandeur of scale and in destructive power this bombardment surpassed any other storm in the whole history of the War, and those who experienced it will not find it hard to believe their verdict. The main object of the enemy during the first two hours was to destroy the British batteries, and at the end of that time part of their fire was diverted on to the positions of the infantry.

A few seconds before the storm opened we received from our F.O.O. the call for the S O S, and as we began firing it, we heard almost at the same moment the first crash of the bombardment. The scene that followed is difficult to describe, impossible to forget: it was more like a convulsion of nature than the work of man. Among the first sounds was the whistling of hundreds of gas-shells, which I heard as I went from gun to gun, checking the angles of fire, and sucking at the tube of my respirator. It was still pitch-dark above, and the only lights below were the flashes from our own guns or the red flaming cores of exploding shells. The flames

[1] The actual numbers furnished by the *Reichsarchiv* to our Official Historian were: Field, 3965, Heavy, 2435; Super-heavy, 73; Total, 6473.

from the muzzles were stabbing out into a dense whitish mist which was now mingled with the gas from the German shells and the dark drifting clouds from their explosions. For the fraction of a second a gun and the men who were firing it, gloved, masked, and helmeted, would start into view, lit by a sudden flash, and would then vanish again into blackness. The noise was so great and varied, so many different chords of sound being mingled in this vast tornado, that an order could barely be heard even when it was shouted through a megaphone at a range of a few yards. Hundreds of heavy shells were exploding just behind us in Holnon Wood; mingled with their explosions we could hear now and then the crash of a falling tree, while high above our heads huge projectiles from long-range guns passed through the sky with a metallic roar on their way to targets far behind the battlefield. But the great bulk of the German fire was falling slightly short of our battery, and this was probably due to the fact that in order to achieve surprise, they had not ranged their guns.

In a few minutes our signallers reported that the telephone wire to the observation post had been blown to pieces in many places within a hundred yards of our position: they went out at great risk to mend the wire, but though many attempts were made, it was found impossible to restore communication.

When dawn came at 6 a.m., we were still firing a defensive barrage. The ground mist was now mingled with gas and the dun sultry smoke of the bombardment, which enveloped us on every side, and at this time our range of vision was not much more than seventy yards. On the whole we had, so far, been fortunate: if the Germans had lengthened their range by a hundred yards,

we should probably have been put out of action; but our sergeant-major was badly wounded, and we had several serious casualties among our men. Our forward anti-tank gun was hit by a shell; its ammunition was blown up and the gun itself was disabled, and we also lost some of our best horses which were hit in the wood behind us.

Soon after dawn the Major, who was recovering from a severe illness, came driving up through the mist in a mule-cart, bringing with him several wagons of ammunition. He had come up through a hail of German shells; sitting on the box of the cart with the reins in his hands he looked as though he were taking the air in conditions of perfect health and peace; his arrival at that moment is an incident that I shall not forget, and it had a very cheering effect on the men who were greatly amused by the equipage in which he was riding, and the demure appearance of his mule, which was perfectly groomed, and showed no sign of disturbance at the shattered trees or the thunder of the bombardment.

We went down into the dugout and had a short discussion on the situation. The captain and I both had doses of tear gas—the captain rather a heavy one—and we joined in the conference, with our reddened eyes blinking and streaming with water. At this time no certain news could be got as to whether the Germans had started their assault, and in fact they did not attack until some hours later, at about 9.40 a.m. Most of the telephone wires, like our own, were already blown to pieces, and the mist, aided in some places by German smoke-shell, made it impossible to signal by flag; the only other method of communication in the forward area was by runners; but gas still hung over the field;

runners were often killed, and their progress through the gas was, at best, slow and precarious.

During the morning there was no sign that the Germans were having any success against the redoubt at the Quarry, but on our left, near Selency, and on our right, near Savy, the fire of their machine guns was drawing nearer. Owing to the breakage in the telephone line we had had no message from our F.O.O. for many hours; but he returned at last through intense shell-fire to report by word of mouth. In the early afternoon our battery was ordered to retire into the Battle Zone, and one section remained behind with its teams and limbers hidden in the trees in order to cover the retirement.

When we had fired off all the ammunition that was left, this section was also limbered up and went back to the battle position near Etreillers. The mist was now dispersing, and I went forward as F.O.O. with one of our signallers, to signal targets by flag. In front of Holnon Wood the ground slopes gradually upward to the Round Hill, then there is a slight dip in the land, and beyond it are the lower slopes of Manchester Hill. On my way up the Round Hill, I found that the mist was dissolving, especially on the higher ground, and here we were no longer troubled by gas. A dead corporal lay on the slope, and half-way up the hill a platoon of our infantry was retiring in open order towards the Battle Zone. When I reached the crest, I saw that our outpost redoubt at the Brown Quarry, that held out so gallantly for more than seven hours against the full tide of the attack, was now cut off on the north and west by the German infantry: a large number of grey misty figures, easily recognised as Germans by the shape of their helmets, stood halted on the skyline of Manchester

Hill, and two platoons had detached themselves from the mass and were advancing towards us down the western slope. They were about five hundred yards in front of us, advancing in close order with excellent dressing, grey steely lines with low-flying German aeroplanes passing above them in the mist. We had expected an attack with tanks, but there was no tank in view, and in fact very few were used by the Germans on the whole front of the Fifth Army. The advance was covered by heavy machine gun fire, and many bullets whizzed past us, some of which were probably aimed at our flag as we sat signalling the target from the edge of a shell-hole. Some British shrapnel, excellently timed, burst above the German troops in glinting spirals of smoke, and to avoid it they turned slightly to their left, advancing near the line of the St. Quentin railway.

The scene at this moment was one of great grandeur: the German aeroplanes came on, dipping and swerving in front of the grey lines of infantry and firing with their machine guns at the advanced sections of the British field artillery, who replied to their fire with rifles and Lewis guns; the German artillery, whose numbers, like those of their infantry, vastly exceeded our own, were pouring their fire on the Battle Zone behind, and there was a continuous background of thunder which seemed to extend for many miles on either side of us beneath the low dun-coloured sky in which the smoke of the battle was mingled with the remains of the mist.

We were now in a new No Man's Land between the two armies: after repeating our signal several times, we went down to an anti-tank gun at the foot of the hill, and warned the officer of the line of advance. This gun opened rapid fire on the enemy, and while it was

doing so, a German aeroplane swooped down out of the mist and fired at us with a machine gun from a height of about two hundred feet. After a brisk engagement we drove the aeroplane off with a Lewis gun, and I went to the Battle Zone O.P. to report the German advance to the Major.

When I reached the O.P. which was near the reserve trenches, the Major told me that he thought we were in danger of being outflanked on the right. Between 5.0 and 5.30 p.m. we saw a long line of Germans in close order advancing against the front line of our Battle Zone near Savy. These storm troops were an impressive sight, and they were not difficult to see, as the sun was now piercing the mist and glinting on their helmets. They were supported by a heavy bombardment and by much chattering and lashing of machine guns; many shells fell round us, and one of them, a 5.9, burst with a terrific detonation very near to our O.P., and blew our telephone wire to pieces.

Our signaller twice ran out another line, but both times it was broken again in a few minutes. As we found it impossible to keep up communication, we went to another O.P. in a south edge of Holnon Wood; this post had a buried cable, still uncut, which we used for directing the fire of the battery on the Germans who were attacking Savy. When night fell, the enemy were held up in many places by our wire entanglements; here and there they had entered our first line trenches, but they had not yet made any real headway into the Battle Zone.

3

During the first day we had lost heavily in infantry

who had held the forward redoubts for many hours against overwhelming odds, and amongst these was Colonel Elstob who commanded a battalion of the Manchesters at Manchester Hill and was awarded the V.C. after his death. The R.F.A. in our division lost a large number of guns, most of which were hit or disabled in the Outpost Zone, and some of our batteries had had very heavy casualties and were now seriously short of officers. It was clear that the Germans had a great superiority in numbers both of guns and infantry; but we still hoped that if we could hold them up in the Battle Zone, reinforcements would arrive in time to save the situation, and we did not know then how few were available.[1]

I spent the night at the O.P. After nightfall the infantry signalled for the S O S and the O.P. was heavily shelled for two hours by the German heavy artillery. There were many bursts of machine-gun fire on both our flanks, to the north and to the south, and the position during the hours of darkness was far too vague to be pleasant. On the morning of the 22nd a sickly dawn was faintly diffused through a dense yellowish mist. Observation was impossible from the O.P., and I went to one of our forward machine gun posts, but the mist here was equally thick. In these conditions of blind man's buff men had to depend on their ears, on the sound of fire rather than the sight or movement, and information gathered in this way was at best of a hazardous kind. The enemy was again showing activity; there were several bursts of rifle-fire

[1] Our Corps was strengthened by one new division, the 20th, which was allocated to it at 1 p.m. on the 21st of March. This division had been in reserve at Libermont, about 14 miles from the front line.

a short way in front of us, and these were soon followed by a renewal of the bombardment.

Soon after I returned to the O.P., I was relieved by Hardie, one of my brother officers, who brought with him a G.S. wagon to carry back the bodies of our men who had been killed the day before and lay near the edge of the wood. The Germans were now opening a heavy bombardment on the whole area between Holnon Wood and our battle position, and as this was the ground which I had to cross with my signaller, we had a very exciting walk. A large proportion of the fire came from big high velocity guns, whose shells arrived with a sudden crash and seemed to outpace their own sound. We reached the battery, unshaven and extremely hungry, our tunics bespattered with huge dollops of mud from one of these explosions. During the day the Germans made attacks on Roupy, on Savy, and on both sides of Holnon Wood. The German fire on our battery was directed by aeroplanes, five coming over at once at a height of about 300 feet: they sprayed us with their machine guns, and wounded some of our horses; we replied with rifles and Lewis guns, and we hit one of the aeroplanes which swerved downward like a wounded pheasant into a field half a mile behind us.

In the early afternoon the Major came back from a reconnaissance, and joined me at the guns, which during the morning had been directing a continuous fire against the German attack between Savy and Holnon Wood. The Germans were searching for our battery with heavy artillery: a great number of shells were bursting in the field in front of us, and while we were discussing the situation, a shell from a high velocity gun came by with a swish and a roar, and entered the ground very close

to us. Thanks to the fault of some German munition-maker it failed to explode; for a moment the Major contemplated the dark steaming tunnel that had been pierced in the earth within a few yards of his feet, and then he continued the conversation at the exact point where he had broken it off.

Between two and three in the afternoon the position became very serious. The Germans after heavy fighting captured Roupy on our right: on the Savy sector they had been driven back, but on their second attempt they captured the front line of the Battle Zone, and began to advance down the southern side of the wood. We immediately switched our fire and put up a barrage of shrapnel in front of the new advance.

Hardie, who had relieved me at the O.P. in the edge of the wood, was very nearly cut off by the Germans. He was ordered to report to the battery, and it was with great relief that we saw at last his slim youthful figure, much begrimed, coming back through the shell-smoke. His horse had been wounded and he was limping badly himself, as he had been hit on the leg by a spent splinter of shell.

Soon after his return news came that the Germans were breaking through further to the left, on the northern side of the wood. Both our flanks were now threatened, and the situation was of the most critical kind, as the enemy were also advancing in front; but for the moment the main threat seemed to be coming from the left. We told the men how things lay, switched the guns on to the new sector and opened rapid fire. Our gunners had now been firing with scarcely any rest since the early morning of the 21st of March, a period of about thirty-six hours: the recoil mechanism of two of the

guns had failed and they had now to be run out by hand; for some part of this time our men had been firing in gas-masks; their eyes were inflamed by the gas and by fumes from the breeches, and their faces were lined with fatigue, but after their long endurance their response to our appeal was magnificent.

It was a fine spurt at the end of a long race; and the end came before we expected it: while we were still firing to check the advance on the north of the wood, a mounted orderly appeared on our flank galloping up through the smoke. He was narrowly missed by a German shell: his horse started aside, then came on again, and halting behind the battery, he handed us a written order from headquarters to retire to Ham.

Until this point we had thought that we were fighting a delaying action to allow reinforcements time to arrive; we should not have been surprised by an order to retire for half a mile, but as the crow flies, Ham was about seven miles to our rear, and a ten mile march by road. Such an order as this was entirely beyond our experience; we read it with amazement, and it dawned on us at last that the reinforcements we had imagined were creatures of our own fancy.

In answer to our signal the gun teams came up from the valley; kits were loaded into the G.S. wagon and the guns were limbered up, the last section remaining in action and covering by its fire the retirement of the other two.

This march was a sombre experience. As we rode through Foreste, great shells from the German long-range guns were roaring through the sky and falling on farms and villages far away from the battlefield. There were a number of wounded men walking along the road,

and during a short halt I found a medical officer to attend to them; but we could not discover an ambulance, and we were not allowed to hoist them on to our limbers, as we had to be ready to go into action again at any moment. At Villers St. Christophe a heavy German shell burst near the battery and killed some infantry who were passing the crossroabs. In front and on either side of the road farms and steabings had been set on fire, and their smoke rolled upward in dense curling clouds that brooded heavily beneath the low sultry sky.

During one of our halts I was suddenly conscious of intense hunger and realised almost for the first time that during the last forty hours we had had very little to eat. I remembered that somewhere in my pocket was a nugget of chocolate, and in my search for it I found nestling against it my small edition of *Pickwick*. I ate that worn and rounded nugget with a ravenous appetite, and as for Pickwick, the mere thought of him seemed by its contrast to add a startling emphasis to the scene that surrounded us.

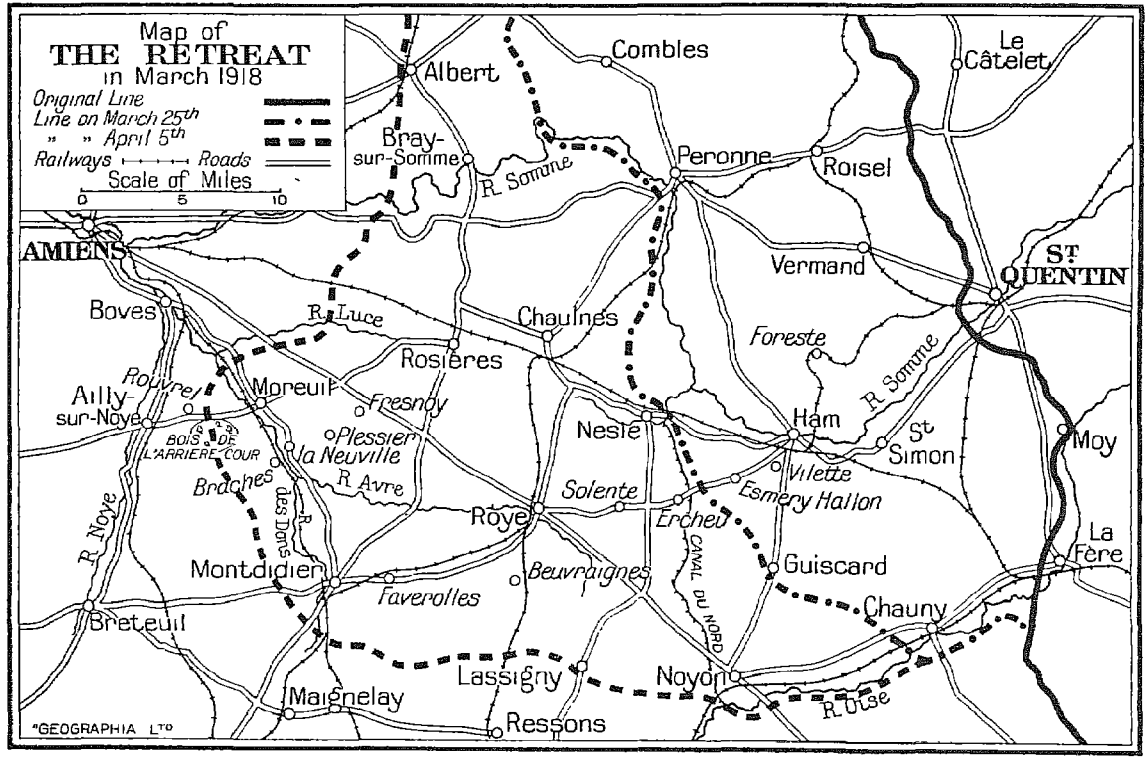
When we entered Ham, the Germans were firing on the town with long-range guns, some of which were aiming at the bridges of the Somme canal. The civilian population had vanished and there were many signs of the haste with which they had fled; in many of the shops the blinds were not drawn and the shutters were still unclosed; dresses and hats still adorned the windows of the draper, and at the butcher's pieces of meat were still hanging, rather obtrusively, on their hooks; but there was no draper, and no butcher now, and no women to look at the dresses and the hats. While we were marching down the main street a man ran out with a box containing a large number of eggs and gave it to

the Captain to prevent it falling into the hands of the enemy. We crossed the bridge over the Somme Canal, and halted a short distance away on the south side of the town. It was nearly midnight when we finished watering and feeding our horses, and about 1 a.m. we had a meal of bully beef and eggs, and lay down to sleep on the floor of a small wooden hut near the side of the road.

4

Few of us had had more than four hours' sleep in all, since the morning of the 20th of March, a period of about sixty-five hours. But now we were not to rest for long: at 4.15 on the morning of the 23rd an orderly came into our hut with news that the Germans had entered Ham on the other side of the canal. The Major and I saw the Colonel on the road from Golancourt, and we were given orders to choose a position to the west of the road and to go into action at once. We limbered up the guns and took them into a position at the edge of a small wood in front of Vilette, but in directing our fire we were again hampered by the fog.

Through this fog the German attack was made on the bridge-head at Ham at six in the morning. Ham was defended by the 89th Brigade, and the line of defence was more than two miles long, too extensive to be held against superior numbers by three battalions, which were greatly beneath their proper strength. This brigade was attacked in the rear as well as in front; some of them after heavy fighting were cut off in the town, but some succeeded in fighting their way back over the western bridge and the charges were exploded at 8 a.m. just as the enemy was gaining a foot on it. The explosion


Map of
THE RETREAT
in March 1918
Original Line
Line on March 25th
" " April 5th
Railways
Roads
Scale of Miles
0 5 10
Albert
Combles
Le Câtelet
Bray-sur-Somme
R. Somme
Peronne
Roisel
AMIENS
Vermand
ST QUENTIN
Boves
R. Luce
Chaulnes
Foreste
Rosières
Rouvre
Ailly-sur-Noye
Moreuil
Fresnoy
Plessier
la Neuville
Bois de L'Arrière Cour
Nesle
Ham
St Simon
Moy
Vilette
Esmery Hallon
Bracheux
R. Avre
Solente
Roye
Ercheu
La Fère
R. Noye
Montdidier
Beuvraignes
Guiscard
Faverolles
Chauny
Breteuil
Lassigny
Noyon
Maignelay
R. Oise
Ressons
GEOGRAPHIA LTD

was not decisive: it cut the girders in the centre, but the ends fell on the walls of the lock, so that the gap in the bridge was a small one.[1]

On that foggy morning the gunners had to rely on the sound of the German fire, rather than on anything they could see; information was vague and fragmentary, and when the mist was too thick for observation, we fired by the map. We had been in action for some hours when an orderly galloped up to the battery and handed me an urgent order from Brigade H.Q. to move the guns to a position near Esmery Hallon.

The Major and I cantered round the edge of the village, chose a new position, and ran out a telephone line to the church tower so as to use it as an O.P. for the battery; we then opened fire on the roads and road-junctions so as to harass the German advance. At 2.30 p.m. a counter attack was made on the bridge-head at Ham by a small composite force of the 61st Division, but this attack was soon held up by machine guns.

When dusk came, the Major and I went forward to the infantry line between us and the canal, and talked to several of the officers. Owing to the losses of the last three days there was now a great shortage of men, and those who remained were much exhausted with continuous fighting and with want of sleep. There were no prepared defences: the line was a series of posts in the fields, and it was very thinly held. To prevent the battery being rushed in the night an officer and fifteen of our gunners, armed with rifles, were posted about two hundred yards in front of the guns. Five men from the infantry were attached to us, and were posted as sentries on the road to Golancourt to guard

[1] See *Official History of the War. France and Belgium* 1918, pp. 280, 340.

our right flank. At 11 p.m. I went out with the Major to explore this road and near it we found a line of infantry of the 36th division lying down in the fields. About midnight there were bursts of machine gun fire in Golancourt and I met some wounded men coming down the road. One of them, an N.C.O. of the R.E., told me that the Germans had taken Golancourt. I brought these men to the Major who had returned to the battery; when he had examined them, he sent a mounted orderly to warn Brigade H.Q., as it was clear that the capture of this village meant that our right flank was threatened.

Just before dawn on the 24th we moved to a position behind Esmery Hallon. About 7.30 a.m. the Germans again began to advance covered by great numbers of machine guns and mortars, the tapping and chattering of separate guns being completely lost in the general volume of lashing sound which came out of the mist in front of us. The surviving guns of our brigade were aligned behind a low crest, and opened rapid fire, putting down a barrage in front of our thin line of infantry. Some of our shells were set at fuze 'O', so as to burst near the muzzle in case the Germans tried to rush the guns. After continuing in action for two or three hours we again got orders to retire. In many ways this action was typical of those in which we were engaged almost every day until the first week in April when the German advance was finally brought to a standstill in front of Amiens. After retiring from Esmery Hallon we were in action against the German advance guard at Ercheu, Solente, and Beauvraignes; then we marched northwards from Montdidier up the Eastern bank of the river, took part in an engagement at

Fresnoy, and crossing to the Western bank we were in action for some days in the battle of the Avre in defence of Amiens.

During these engagements, though our troops were feeling the shortage of rations, an even more important factor both for ourselves and the enemy was want of sleep. On the march to Ercheu we found a number of exhausted infantry lying prone on the grass by the side of the road; the German guns were in action, and many shells were falling near at hand, but the explosions did not seem to have the least effect on their slumbers. Some of us dismounted from our horses and tried to rouse them, but the sleep that drugged them was that of utterly weary men; it was so profound that it was almost impossible to wake them, and when at last we succeeded, I felt no confidence that they would be able to keep their eyes open for more than a few minutes. There were many cases later in the retreat when from sheer exhaustion men fell asleep in the middle of a battle with the shells bursting round them.

The morale of the men was excellent and so it continued: the main danger was not the loss of morale, but the dull weight of physical fatigue which pressed more and more heavily on the troops from day to day and from hour to hour. This was especially true in the case of the infantry: it has been related that in one battered division the men were so worn out that when after being withdrawn to reserve, they were again ordered to the front, they had to be given half an hour's rest after each mile of marching. Units and even the remnants of different divisions became for a time intermingled, but the men were very far from giving up the fight, although they knew that they were opposed by

overwhelming odds. They were ready to put themselves under the command of any officer who appeared on the spot, and on one of these days a Colonel reported that he had collected nine hundred men from eleven different units.[1]

During the afternoon of the 24th we were in action in an orchard in front of Ercheu, when the Colonel came up to the position: he seemed to be in good spirits and walked round the guns with twinkling eyes: 'I'm glad to see you're all shaved,' he said,—a remark with more meaning than may appear, for shaving during a retreat is something more than a comfort; it is also a sign of order in a disordered world and has a queer psychological importance. When night came, we bivouacked in the open, and had just sat down, ravenously hungry, to our meagre meal of hard biscuit and a fragment of bully beef, when an orderly came trotting up through the shell-fire mounted on a tired and labouring horse. I glanced at a bulging bag that was slung over his shoulder and asked him what he had brought.

"It's the mail, Sir," he said in a matter-of-fact voice, as though it were the most natural thing in the world that when the infantry were short of ammunition, and everyone was short of rations, the post should nevertheless arrive with due punctuality and in the middle of a moving battle should find its right destination.

There was an exclamation from Tom, one of my brother officers, as he opened a parcel and exposed to our hungry eyes the neat rotund form of a haggis. Tom, with his usual quixotism, insisted that we should all have a share of it, and I'm afraid his proposal was met with a very light resistance. The portions, when

[1] See *Official History of the War. France and Belgium* 1918, p. 400.

equally divided, were not large, but they were a luxury impossible to forget; some people dislike the name of haggis, others dislike its taste; I never had a great leaning to it before, but since that evening I have regarded it with an almost superstitious veneration.

On the 24th and 25th of March our line on the Canal du Nord was reinforced by French infantry, but very few of their guns had yet arrived. I was acting as F.O.O. during the morning of the 25th and the fire from the German guns became very lively as the day drew on; the advance of their infantry could be followed even where there were strands of mist, as they were constantly sending up light signals to their own artillery, a double-edged expedient which was most useful to our own guns as well as to theirs. I could see their figures moving among the trees on the far side of the canal and many of our shells burst among the branches above their heads. Libermont and Ercheu were pounded by their guns and the telephone-wire to our O.P. was repeatedly broken, so that we took to signalling by flag.

About half past four in the afternoon of the 25th, the French fell back on our right, and the retirement that followed was one of the most critical in the whole retreat. Our battery was used as part of the rearguard and went into action in an open field, firing at a rapid rate up the road to Libermont down which the Germans were advancing. While we were firing from this position, a field battery that we had never seen before, suddenly appeared round the edge of a wood, advanced at a canter, broke into a gallop, and came into action beside us. This was a fine spectacle, and it was very pleasant to see the young subaltern who led the battery, galloping towards us with six guns thundering behind

him, his face flushed with excitement and very obviously enjoying his ride.

We now had eleven guns firing in line, and behind us was a long column of limbers, lorries, and G.S. wagons, the transport of several divisions mingled together and all retiring along the narrow country road that leads to Roye. To the north of the road a small body of intensely weary infantry, the relics of a battalion, plodded westward over the fields. Owing to the press of traffic the pace was extremely slow, and now and then a large part of the transport halted altogether; one of these stoppages, owing to the ditching of a lorry, lasted for about fifteen minutes, and complete disaster might well have followed if the Germans had sent over low-flying aeroplanes to bomb this long stationary column. We expected that at any moment we might be attacked by cavalry, but we never saw any German cavalry in this or in any other action during the retreat.

There was now a great shortage of men: the four divisions of our own Corps, owing to the drainage of constant fighting, were reduced in infantry strength to only a thousand men each; a division was now no more than a battalion. At Beauvraignes on the 26th we fought a rearguard action with French infantry in front of us. In the retirement there were a large number of casualties; the Germans dropped heavy shells near the road and men and horses were killed on the crossroads near the town. The Major dismounted under heavy fire, shot two of the horses with his revolver to put them out of their pain, and returned to the battery with his tunic soaked in blood. When the action was over, we halted in a field to feed our teams, and while we were doing so, a shell burst among us and hit four of our horses. We

had to shoot two of them, and two, when their wounds were dressed, were led along to join the sad train of wounded animals that followed in the rear of the battery.

When we reached Faverolles, the roads were blocked with civilians many of whom were in a state of extreme panic: haycarts, dog-carts, wheelbarrows, perambulators, anything that had wheels beneath it, were being loaded under the direction of aged men and women with feather mattresses, chairs, parasols, chickens, goats, pigs, and every variety of domestic belonging, a strange and pathetic scene not easy to forget. On the march to Montdidier dusk had fallen, and everyone was desperately tired; Hardie and I had to ride up and down to see that the men did not fall asleep in the saddle, a gloomy form of exercise which seemed to help us to keep awake ourselves. I was riding at the head of the battery when a captain who was in charge of a dump, suddenly dashed out from the side of the road. He told me that his dump contained many thousands of rounds of ammunition for field guns, and begged me to fill up our wagons. But our wagons were already full, and when I told him this, he walked beside my horse, and asked me what he could possibly do to dispose of his huge pile of munitions. To blow it up would cause devastation, but to leave it would mean capture. I advised him to blow it up.

When we reached Montdidier, late in the evening of the 26th, the town was deserted and completely silent; the only sounds were the clopping of our horses' hoofs, and the jangle of the gun-shields, as the wheels rumbled over the cobbles; the whole darkened town seemed to become a whispering gallery in which the ghostly echoes of the moving battery came and went, fading

away up the alleys, and lost again in the gulf of silence that surrounded us. On our way through the town my horse, Bob, who was half asleep, suddenly pricked up his ears, and made a faint effort to shy at a woman who had appeared on the pavement in front of us. She stood watching us, her black shawl drawn over her head, with old lined features, and a queer light in her eyes; this eerie solitary figure, darkly cowled in her shawl, was the only inhabitant I saw, and I think she had lost her reason. We warned her that the Germans were near, and advised her to leave the town immediately. She seemed to listen; but she paid no attention to our warning and wandered away up one of the side streets, laughing gently to herself.

At midnight we watered our horses outside the town and put them on lines between the apple trees in an orchard, and on the next day (the 27th) we seemed to be marching across a gap between the French and British armies. In the early morning we got orders to advance, moving northward on the eastern side of the river des Dons (a tributary of the Avre), and to report at Davenescourt, a village about six miles north of Montdidier.

It was an exciting march: we had no infantry with us and we knew that the Germans were close to our right flank and might at any moment appear through the mist. We sent out mounted patrols of gunners armed with rifles to the front and also to our Eastern flank, and before taking the branch road that led to Davenescourt Harris was sent down it in command of one of the patrols. After a short absence he returned while we were halted on the road, and reported that the village was full of German infantry. We were now ordered

to cross the river, as we were obviously in danger of being cut off with our backs to the marshes, and in the afternoon we crossed again to the eastern bank, and reached Plessier about eleven in the evening.

The inhabitants had fled from the village; some of the doors in the street were still open and there were many other signs of the haste with which they had left. We billeted the men in a barn, where there was an abundant supply of hay and straw for them to sleep on, and then found our way into a large deserted house. In the dining-room the table was laid for a hurried meal, but the remains of it had never been cleared away. I was not on guard during the first part of the night, and after sharing in the hospitality of our anonymous host I went up to a bedroom to get a few hours of rest. The bedroom had belonged to a lady, an empty jewel case lay open on the dressing-table and some obscure relics of feminine clothing were laid out on a chair; a number of dresses had been taken out of the wardrobe as though my unknown hostess had meant to pack them up and take them away with her, but had had no time to do so. It was now about one in the morning and I had scarcely lain down on the bulging luxuriant pillows of the sturdy four-post bed, when we got orders from the Colonel to go into action immediately about a mile to the north of the village.

Many of our men were weak with fatigue and want of sleep: before we moved off, some of the drivers had to be helped to mount their horses, and when we were in action later in the day, four men, instead of two, were needed in order to shift the trail of a gun.

We spent most of the morning in a heavy action between Fresnoy and Hangest against a German force

which was attacking us from the south. They opened a brisk fire from the woods and coppices, which gave them good cover from view, while our brigade replied to them with shrapnel and high explosive, many of our shells bursting among the boughs of the trees. When we had been engaged for some time, bullets began to come in from our right flank, a disconcerting fact which was soon explained by a mounted orderly who galloped up to the battery with the news that Plessier had been captured by the enemy. As Plessier lay between us and the river Avre, to the rear of our right flank, we were clearly in danger of being surrounded, and we got orders from headquarters to make a wide detour and cross the river further north, near the town of Moreuil.

Six of our wagons were in danger: they were under orders to refill with ammunition on the western side of the river and to come up to the battery by the Plessier road which was now in the hands of the Germans. The Major told me to ride down to the bridge at La Neuville and to intercept the wagons before they fell into the trap, but it seemed quite probable that it was already too late to do so. I rode across country with Howarth, my horseholder, making a circuit to the north of Plessier: when we reached the valley, we galloped southwards down the road to La Neuville from which the bridge crosses to Braches on the western bank of the Avre. My horse Bob had had a good feed, and now he seemed to know that something was expected of him, and rose to the effort better than I had thought possible after his heavy work of the last week. About half a mile short of the village I met an officer on patrol who told me that the Germans were very close to La Neuville and that

their snipers were at work on the Neuville-Plessier road.

When we reached the village, there were rifle shots close at hand; as we rode down the street, bullets whizzed over us or struck with a clap on the walls of the houses; but there was no one to be seen, no inhabitants, no soldiers of either side: for the moment La Neuville was a new No Man's Land in the swiftly moving scene of the battle. We rode on through the village, not knowing whom we should meet at the next corner, wheeled to the right, and went down to the bridge over the Avre. On the further bank was a small party of sappers who had already fixed their charges and were about to blow up the bridge. We rode over before they did so; I think we were the last men who ever crossed it, and soon after we passed over, I found, to my great relief, that our wagons were still safe on the western bank of the river.

5

During the first week of April we were engaged in the battle of the Avre in defence of Amiens in which the main objects of the enemy were to cut the railway and capture the town. For some days their shells were bursting on either side of the line, as train after train of reinforcements ran their strange gauntlet to the north; but though they often bracketed the railway with their shells, their advancing troops were stopped at last when they were less than two miles from their goal.

During this battle we made friends with some French dragoons and exchanged our bully beef for theirs. The bully beef of the French did not taste of beef; I never

discovered what it was made of, and when I asked one of the dragoons, he said that in the French Army it was known as 'singe'; but whatever its composition, after the meagre monotony of iron rations the main point now was its difference, and we were both pleased with the exchange. It was a long time since we had had a ration of bread, and an even more important transaction was an exchange of the tough gritty biscuits of our iron ration for good French loaves; and here again, with a courtesy difficult to exaggerate, the cavalry professed that they were pleased.

On the 31st of March, during one of the last German attacks, the Major and I acted as F.O.O.'s with the French infantry, who had dug themselves in on the high ground to the east of the Bois de L'Arrière Cour. The trench was near the crest of one of the low hills looking down towards the Avre and our observation post was a new shell-hole about forty yards in front of it. For several hours the German field guns bombarded the position with shells which were fitted with instantaneous fuses: they burst immediately they touched the ground, before burying themselves in the soil, and their effect was much greater than that of the type used in 1917. The trench was full of infantry, a long close line of horizon blue, the men leaning against the back of it or standing up shoulder to shoulder and looking out over the top of the shallow parapet, as they waited for the attack.

After the burst of a shell there was often a call for stretcher-bearers, and prostrate blue forms were borne away one after another to the dressing station behind the crest of the hill. There were many casualties during this bombardment; and then out of a film of mist

about 600 yards in front of us came the long grey line of the German infantry, ghostly at first and difficult to discern, but soon becoming clear and solid against the grass as they advanced up the gradual slope of the fields. The impression they gave was very different from that of the storm troops who had attacked at St. Quentin; their line now seemed to move more slowly, with the labour of weary men, suffering from want of sleep and food, and the deep physical fatigue of long endurance.

At the moment when they came through the mist, the French opened a heavy fire with their machine guns, and the Major gave out a range and an angle of fire to our signaller who was squatting over his 'buzzer' in the shallow pit of the shell-hole; there was a pause of a few seconds, and then the shells from the surviving guns of our brigade came over our heads and the smoke of the shrapnel curled and glinted in front of the advancing line. They still came on, very slowly, for a few hundred yards, and then they suddenly lay down on the grass and began to dig themselves in until the dusk closed over them and hid them from sight.

The last big attack on Amiens took place on the 4th of April: this assault failed either to take the town or to cut the Amiens-Paris railway, and Ludendorff has related that it was now 'an established fact that the enemy's resistance was beyond our strength.'

On our own sector the Germans made a slight advance on this day and reached a farm near Rouvrel, less than two miles from the railway. We bombarded them here for two days, while they fired at the railway and dropped many shells near our battery: it was a narrow margin, a very close thing indeed, but they never advanced any further.

6

On the 7th of April we were taken out of action and moved northward to Flanders to take part in the battle of the Lys.

A pleasant memory of that time was a day of rest after the battle of the Avre in the house of an old lady who lived near the bank of the Noye. She was a delightful and generous hostess, and offered an apology for not having enough bedrooms for her guests, but we said that we did not need them; we only wanted to sleep, and we did not mind where it was done. With a charming gesture she opened the door of her sitting-room; and any visitor who called on her that afternoon may well have been surprised at finding the unconscious forms of five officers lying prone on the carpet, sunk in an abyss of slumber, which lasted through the night and far into the next day. When at last I woke up, I went out into the garden and found our hostess standing near the gate in a state of great distress and trying to hide her tears. When I asked her what was the matter, she pointed to Jim, one of my brother officers, who was still yawning on the other side of the lawn: 'Il est trop jeune,' she said, '—trop jeune pour la guerre.' Jim did not look more than eighteen, and perhaps she was right; but he was a very efficient soldier and he had already seen more war than all his fathers.

* * * * * *

On the 9th of April Ludendorff launched the second thrust of his vast offensive on the sector south of Ypres and opened the battle of the Lys. This sector was widely different from that of St. Quentin: the railway was

only a few miles from the trenches, and bases and communications were all close together, confined in a narrow strip of land which was bounded on the west by the Channel ports and the sea. Here there was little room for manœuvre, or for a long series of rearguard actions like those which had been fought in Picardy. The Portuguese retreated on the 9th; Armentières and Bailleul fell on the 11th, and the next day Haig issued his famous order: 'There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man. . . . With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end.'

After the retreat of the Portuguese our surviving guns were loaded onto a train, and with other remnants from the battles in Picardy, we rumbled northward to Flanders and took up a position on the high ground of the Scherpenberg which looks down at Bailleul lying in the plain below it. The retirement of the Portuguese had put the Germans at a disadvantage: the enemy was now in a salient whilst we held the high ground which looked down on it; we could fire at their gun flashes, which were often visible in the plain beneath us, but the crest of the hill hid our own flashes from view and the position at Ypres had been reversed.

Bailleul had already fallen before we arrived; part of it was soon set on fire by the bombardment of our artillery and the smoke of burning houses mingled with that of our own shells rolled out in sullen clouds over the fields. Until now Bailleul had been an oasis in the desert, surviving almost untouched for the whole period of the War: its modest estaminets were known to most regiments in the army, and it was a frequent halting-

place for troops on the march, moving up or down from the line; we ourselves had once had a mess in the main street, and to fire on it now seemed almost as great a sacrilege as firing on our own homes, one of the queer necessities of war.

At the battle of Kemmel Hill the situation was changed again: the Germans captured the hill from the French on the 25th of April, and looked down on our batteries which were then on the low ground between Kemmel and Ypres. Many of us, including myself, were hit by tiny splinters of shell, whose effect, though unpleasant, was extremely trivial unless they happened to hit a man in the head. The Germans were searching for our range; we saw their shells creeping up towards us, about fifty yards at a time, and it was not long before they 'bracketed' the battery, some of them bursting just in front of the guns and others falling in the water of a pond about twenty yards to our rear. It was a typical Flemish pond with willows round it, where the frogs croak on summer evenings; but now there were no frogs to be heard, and where the shells fell, the water spurted up high above the willows in spouts and geysers of muddy spray. The German fire was extremely accurate, and we had serious losses. One of the guns in my section was badly hit and put out of action: the cartridge with which it was being loaded, was struck by a splinter; a flare of dazzling pinkish flame flashed up thirty feet into the air, and when I reached the gun, I found three of my best men lying with blackened faces, dead at their posts. The sight had been blown off the gun and the shield had been ripped through as though it were a sheet of tin. We had many other casualties; the French

seventy-fives in a field on our right suffered even more severely than we did, and one after another their wounded were carried back to the rear with gas masks over their heads.

Plumer shortened our line by withdrawing it to a position just east of Ypres, making a clean amputation of a large part of the Salient; it was the most deadly pocket of land known to the Army, and no one whom I met at the time showed much regret at its loss. The Germans' final assault took place on the 29th, but their attack failed: though they came within a mile of Ypres, they never reached it, and that proud ruin with its million wounds, its shell-starred battlements, its broken and pounded towers, still looked out, uncaptured, over the graves of a generation.

7

By the end of April both of Ludendorff's gigantic attacks against the British Army had failed in their main purpose: the British had not suffered a Sedan, and their army had not been separated from that of the French; in France a huge bulge had been made in the line, and it had been bent in Flanders; but Amiens and Ypres and Hazebrouck were still held, and the vital railways in both countries were still unsevered. The losses on both sides were immense, but for these gains Germany had paid a heavier toll in casualties than the Allies: between the 21st of March and the end of April the German losses in officers and men were over 348,000, whilst the losses of the Allies were about 330,000.[1] It must be borne in mind, however, that as

[1] See *Official History, France and Belgium* 1918, II. 490, where the figures are given in detail.

we were retreating, our losses included a greater proportion of prisoners.

By a curious irony the German advance in March was hampered by the devastation which they had made themselves during their retreat in 1917; its progress had been hindered by the necessity of repairing roads and railways, by want of ammunition and supply, and not least by the temptations offered to the weary soldier by captured canteens and depots of food. These depots not only delayed the march, but also had a more subtle and insidious effect on the troops by leading them to distrust the propaganda that had been poured into their ears: they had been led to believe that submarines had reduced England to the point of starvation, but they had now direct experience that the British troops were far better provided for than themselves.

The main difficulty of the British Fifth Army was its need for reinforcements owing to the fact that it was attacked by odds of three or four to one. According to figures given to the Prime Minister on the 23rd of March, two days after the attack opened, there were at that date in England 170,000 soldiers of whom 50,000 were between the ages of 18½ and 19.[1] If these men had been sent to the front before the battle began, it is obvious that events might have followed a very different course, even if the youths had been kept at home.

According to German authorities there was a division of opinion as to whether their troops were more helped or hampered by the fog. It acted as a kind of smoke-screen, often forced our artillery to fire by the map, and prevented accurate observation of fire; though both

[1] See *War Memoirs of Mr. Lloyd George*, V, 2887. Mr. Lloyd George also states that according to figures shewn him at the War Office 88,000 men were on leave in England.

sides were hampered by it. In my own experience the fog was a strong advantage to the attacking troops, especially when they were moving across open country.

From regimental officers who took part in the rearguard actions of March I never heard a word of criticism against General Gough for ordering us to retreat; it was obvious that any attempt to hold a rigid line against overwhelming odds, when our flank was being turned by the enemy, would have resulted in complete disaster. The only course was to fight a series of rearguard actions and to make the Germans pay as heavy a toll as possible for their advance, and these tactics succeeded in the end.

What impressed me most at the time, and survives as an inspiring memory, was the steadiness and fortitude of the British private soldier combined with his queer ironic humour in days of deep privation and extreme adversity.

8

Ludendorff's third great thrust was made against the French on the 27th of May on the front of the Chemin des Dames. The surprise was complete and in five days the Germans advanced about 30 miles, crossed the Aisne, and reached the bank of the Marne. In July Foch made his famous counter-attack at the second battle of the Marne; but the first great blow to the morale of the German Supreme Command was inflicted by British troops in their attack in front of Amiens on the 8th of August. In this action negative secrecy was subtly combined with positive deception as to the sector where the attack was intended: no warning was given by a preliminary bombardment, 456 tanks took part in the assault, and in military history this battle may well be

regarded as a classic example of the use of surprise in warfare.

After this victory Ludendorff recorded that 'August 8th was the black day of the German Army,' and he added that 'the War would have to be ended.' The Kaiser took a similar view: 'I see that we must strike a balance,' he said. 'We are at the end of our resources.' The battle was fought on Haig's initiative, his suggestion being contained in a letter to Foch written on the 17th of July.[1]

From that day victory followed victory; German morale continued to decline, and on the 27th of September the Hindenburg Line itself was captured by the First and Third British Armies. The Hindenburg Line was the work of the best engineering brains in Germany and though it was probably the strongest and most ingenious fortress ever made by man, it fell in a single day. Its capture was the signal for a general advance along the whole line of battle. The end of the War came six weeks later with the signing of the Armistice.

In every previous year many people at home had hoped for the end of the War before Christmas, but now, when they had almost ceased to do so, the end had actually come. As late as the 25th of July Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had advised Haig in a bulky document of thirty typewritten pages that 'our objectives should be limited and our aims defensive.' In Wilson's view the date to aim at for an allied offensive in the west was the 1st of July 1919.[2] In discussing that intricate complex of causes that brought the War to an

[1] *Haig* by Duff Cooper, II, 330.
[2] *Ibid.*, II, 327.

end a library of books might be written, but the view held by many that the main cause was Birtish Sea Power is probably true. The blockade affected not only morale in Germany, but also strategy at the front: it was probably the dominant factor which made Ludendorff exhaust his armies in the West instead of holding defensive positions and remaining content with German conquests in the East. As a result of its great advances, the German Army, like a tide on the sand, came to a halt in a long irregular line, with many bays and inlets, but such a line was not strong for defence and offered many chances for the counter-attack. In the sphere of tactics the tank held a foremost place in these later battles. Three years before, as a queer and humble recruit, it had been looked on by many with sceptical amusement, but in later years the Germans came to regard it as one of the leading generals of the Allies, and in the British Army it deserved the rank of a Field Marshal.

* * * * * *

After the fighting in Flanders in the spring of 1918, I was laid up with influenza, and soon after my recovery I was appointed to a section of the Staff in France that dealt with tactical training. The officers in this section had had long experience in the line and they also had access to confidential reports of the battles. Soon after the Armistice a scheme of vocational training was set up in order help our men when they returned to civilian life. In connection with this scheme I went to visit some officers I knew in our advanced Corps which was marching into Germany, and on my way I passed through Spa, which had been the G.H.Q. of the German armies. The Kaiser had just departed to Holland, but

German officers were still in the town and German sentries were still on duty outside their quarters.

I walked up the street with a brother officer, and it was a curious experience, tinged with embarrassment, meeting these field-grey figures and passing them on the footpath with a punctilious exchange of salutes. Some of their faces were pale, but a look of firm, soldierly discipline masked the tragedy of their experiences. We stopped at the bank to inquire whether we could change a cheque, and the official in charge beamed with delight when he saw the colour of our uniforms: he gave us a radiant welcome, and putting his cash-shovel on one side, he shook us warmly by the hands and even shewed signs of embracing us, an operation which was luckily prevented by the intervention of the counter. I have never had such a welcome from a banker before, and I am not optimistic enough to hope that I shall ever have it again. He talked much of the Germans and the hardship of a foreign domination: 'It's been a long time,' he said. 'But it's over at last.' When we left the bank, we saw the house which the Kaiser had occupied, and, near at hand, a villa which had been used by Ludendorff; there were many telephone wires on every side, but by a curious irony I saw no signs of devastation in this vital nerve centre of a great army.

On the way to the frontier the flags of the Allies had appeared as though by magic; they fluttered in their thousands in the streets of towns and villages and the road was spanned by many triumphal arches, decorated with enormous wreaths of laurel. At Liège some French troops were marching proudly through the main street on their way to Germany; they marched

like conquerors; their weathered faces were darkly exultant and their chests were glittering with medals. The roads on both sides of the frontier were scattered with the débris of the German retirement, and a large number of abandoned lorries lay foundered in the ditches. Here and there the corpse of a German charger lay prone by the side of the road with stiffened legs; and in the sidings of the railways were long drab lines of derelict troop-trains that had been left behind under the terms of the Armistice.

Between Verviers and Eupen there was no clear mark at the frontier, but as we drove on, we soon knew that we had crossed it; we passed through a village whose street was gay with bunting and spanned by an arch of laurels, but in the next hamlet which was only a few miles to the east, there was no display of triumph, not a single flag in the windows. There were not many civilians on the road, but most of those whom we saw, had in their faces an expression of dull blank disillusionment. On the German side of the frontier the buildings in farms and villages shewed no outward sign of the scars of war; the walls were still standing, and there were no gaps in the roofs, no shell-holes in the gardens. The signs of desolation were of a subtler kind than these: though they were not to be seen on the walls and roofs of the houses, they were plainly evident in the faces of the people.

The fields were completely deserted, and in all those miles of pasture on either side of the road no single animal was to be seen. In some of the larger towns the streets were crowded with civilians, and walking through these crowds, we were acutely conscious of a tragic tension in the air; the fear of revolution was abroad,

and with good reason, for it had broken out already in some of their towns; but the expression in most faces was one of deep and tragic shock—the blow of a disaster so huge that it was difficult to believe—as though they felt the foundations of their iron state, the very basis of their life, collapsing, and falling away beneath their feet.

One incident in particular seemed typical of the spirit of the nation: a number of German children, many of whom looked thin and underfed, were marching along the road keeping time with a British battalion that had lately crossed the frontier and was now advancing on its way to Cologne. The English were invaders, but they were also soldiers: it was as though the love of an army lay so deep in the bones of these children that it had overcome the feeling of nationality; perhaps they felt also, by a true instinct, that the British soldier is a friend of children, a fact which he frequently shewed in these critical days by giving them a share of his rations, of which they often stood very badly in need.

Chapter XIX

LORD OXFORD IN LATER YEARS

I

When I returned to England in the spring of 1919, the intense relief after the Armistice had brought with it a feverish excitement; in spite of the unchanging element in London, there was something new and strange in the air and something also had passed away, perhaps never to return. England stood at the beginning of a new age.

During these later years my father spent a large part of his time at the Wharf, his small country home at Sutton Courtney, a village on the bank of the Thames, a few miles below Abingdon and not far from Oxford, a city which of all others he loved the best.

The shelves of his library held a collection of Aldines and other early editions of the classics; its windows looked out onto the lawn with its young mulberry trees and its ancient barn, standing slightly askew with walls of mellow brick and weathered thews of timber, and a narrow path, fringed in summer with a long border of hollyhocks, tulips, and rosemary, led down across the grass to the bank of the river. From the further bank of the reach came the sound of water, plunging downward through the sluices of the weir and filling the end of the bathing-pool with trails of swirling bubbles.

He liked to be surrounded by his family and his

friends, and at the end of the week the house was usually full of guests: in the dining-room at lunch or dinner there was much talk, many vivacious voices that echoed from the low ceiling, but it was observed that the host himself did not often launch his boat upon the mingled streams of chaff, discussion, interjection and narrative, that flowed on either side of him. He often seemed to enjoy himself when playing the part of a spectator, viewing the scene around him with a benign detachment, without shewing much desire to take a prominent part in it himself. This receptive attitude was not a sign that he was bored; on the contrary, it was often a sign that he was content. There was a strong element of irony in his nature, though the objects towards which it was shewn, as a rule, were worthy targets; there was also a strong vein of modesty, and he was not inclined to express dogmatic opinions even on subjects of which he had a deeper knowledge than anyone else in the company.

Though on Saturdays and Sundays the Wharf was often filled with guests, during the spaces between it was a good haven for his reflections: it was remote, but not too far from the world; the broad, placid reach of the Thames whispering beneath the alders, the kingfishers that now and then sparkled over the ripples, the music of the water plunging down the weir seemed distant indeed from the frenzies that rent Europe during the period that followed the War; among such events as these the river itself and the wide meadows on either side favoured detachment and calmness of thought. Though he enjoyed greatly the company of his friends, he liked also his moments of solitude, and when the Wharf was empty, he often worked in

the barn near the river, the ground floor of which had been converted into a large sitting-room, and on a summer day he would often sit near a mulberry tree in the garden, writing in pencil the notes for a speech or the manuscript of one of his books.

When the guests arrived, he had many contacts with the world, but before they came, this garden, and the barn, and a quiet room at the Mill House near at hand were a fit setting for one who was grappling with the tangle of problems that faced England at the end of the War, basing his view of the future on the lessons of history, with a broad outlook, a fair and calm perspective, far removed from the passions of the moment.

His mind has been called 'judicial', sometimes as a word of limitation; but many of his actions were swift and decisive, governed by the instinct of a statesman rather than by any formal process, and his power of weighing evidence and discarding the false and the immaterial, enabled him to gauge the teaching of history, a form of tuition greatly needed when the time came for making a Peace; though not infallible, it is one of the few keys that may unlock the door of the future.

The problems which faced the Peacemakers were extraordinary in their number and their complexity. At the end of the War the greater part of Europe and a wide area of Asia seemed to be swept by a vast tidal wave, and many structures that had done good service in their day and stood the wear of centuries, were swirled away in the backwash. On that whirling flood three great monarchies floated among the humbler débris of shattered middle-class homes; the hospitals were still filled with millions of wounded; the poor lost their savings and widows their annuities, though in many

places rich men, who had profited by battle without taking part in it, still squatted on their hoards; revolution was raising its head in many directions, in some parts victorious, in others beaten to the ground; there was civil war in Russia and in Ireland; in some parts of Europe the spirit of internationalism was abroad, but in many a narrow nationalism was asserting itself with increasing violence, and famine and pestilence added to the toll of death by carrying away more lives than had been lost in the War itself; social and economic structures dissolved, religion lost its force, and violent changes took place in the very fabric of life. It had not been a long war when measured by years, but an earthquake does not last so long as the tidal waves that follow it, and now they rolled out far into the future.

Long after the spasms which caused them had come to rest, when the armies of the dead were buried, when towns were reared again and the torn earth was once more under the plough, these further effects were felt in every corner of the world, and there were few spheres of life—religion, art, or literature—which were not affected by their influence.

After the Armistice one of the main causes that worked against a real peace was the fierceness of the passions which had been roused by the propaganda carried on in every country to rouse the instinct for war. These feelings are easy to inflame, but once stirred up, they are difficult to stem and apt to outlive their welcome. The passions of ignorance will often tempt a politician with a bait which he cannot resist, and he sometimes suffers himself from contagion with his own victims.

The effect of propaganda, which had been a most

important weapon while the War continued, still moved on the air when it was over; it was breathed by all; it affected even trained minds, whose sense of history and power of foresight was often twisted or clouded by their emotions. Soldiers are often conscious of some feeling for their enemies which is far removed from hatred: though some be to the east, other to the west of the line, both sides share the experience of that strange isolated world; their feelings are purged by the force of action and by endurances common to both and for more than one cause they feel respect, and a sense of chivalry towards those they have fought. For civilians the position was different: few of them had seen things at first hand as they were; they had felt the strain of long anxiety without sharing the violence of action and they had been more deeply affected than soldiers by the propaganda which had been so ably distilled at home.

In this state of feeling the extraordinary proposal that the Kaiser should be put on his trial gained a wide measure of support, though in such an atmosphere a fair trial would have been beyond the power of man, and a conviction, just or not, might well have made him a martyr, and raised him to a throne even more powerful than the throne he had lost. In these conditions Mr. Lloyd George decided to have a General Election within a few weeks of the Armistice, and passions at home, already excited, were further inflamed by platform speeches in which he promised to prosecute the Kaiser, to punish German officers, and to make Germany pay 'to the very last penny'. After such an election the scales were already loaded; it could scarcely be expected that at the Peace Conference England would be able to hold a wise balance between the realistic

fears of France and the ideals of President Wilson, and in fact no such balance was held.

At the Election in December 1918 my father lost the seat in East Fife which he had held continuously for 32 years. East Fife had strong associations, bound up with the whole of his public life, and its loss was a heavy blow, but he was far from being knocked out by his reverses. In the beginning of 1920, when heads began to cool, he sallied forth from the bank of the Thames and contested Paisley, gallantly assisted by his daughter[1] Violet, who here gained her name as a speaker. Public feeling was beginning to veer : there were now increasing numbers who felt that he had been badly treated, and he was given an enthusiastic reception by large crowds in the streets of London as he drove down to the House of Commons. When he returned to his home, he was in the highest spirits, and was much amused because he had lost his new top-hat, which had been captured as a trophy by a band of medical students.

He did not underestimate the complexity of the tangle of problems with which statesmen had to deal at the Peace Conference, but in a speech at Paisley in February 1920 he made some trenchant criticisms on the way in which they had been met. In his view one of the main defects in the Treaty of Versailles was that it did not define the total liability of Germany : at this time estimates of this liability ranged between fifteen thousand million pounds and twenty-five thousand millions, and in his opinion sums of this magnitude vastly exceeded Germany's capacity to pay. He thought that the provisions which affected Austria were even more severe : Lord Robert Cecil had described them as

[1] Lady Violet Bonham Carter.

'insane' and Asquith quoted him with approval. From the standpoint of equity he urged that the conquered countries ought to have representatives on the Reparation Commission.

He laid emphasis on the unity of the modern world in which no great country can be mutilated without those who inflict the injury also injuring themselves. 'It is becoming increasingly true,' he said, 'that the world is one, economically, industrially, and socially, knit together by a network of bonds and ties, some visible and tangible, some invisible to the naked eye, but which knit, as it were in one framework, the interests and fortunes of all communities on the face of the globe. It was never so true as it is today that if one member suffers, all suffer, and you will never find your way through the terrible imbroglio that the War has created unless you realise the need, the imperious need, of co-operation and goodwill.' And again, of the Treaty of Versailles: 'It is not statesmanship. It is not business. It is not common sense. It is not the clean Peace by which I always meant, and other people meant, to end war with the war.'

From this opinion, expressed in those early days of 1920, few will now be found to dissent. The War had been fought to destroy German militarism, and for the moment it had been destroyed; but the Treaty insured that it should be reborn. Nothing unites more powerfully than a common sense of oppression, and the harder the pressure from without, the deeper the sense of unity within, the stronger the resolution of a proud people to resist and break the bonds; though a nation be split into many parts, severity from without gives them a common focus of action, and however diverse and

divided its elements, there are few better ways of welding them again into one. In spite of the lessons of history it is a curious fact that there were many in those days who thought that Germany had sunk for good, but it is most clearly shewn both in his speeches and his private letters, written at the time, that Asquith held a very different opinion.

2

The most urgent problem at home was the civil war that had broken out in Ireland, which bore very little resemblance to civil wars of the past. Here were no pitched battles, no Rupert, no Cromwell: it was a war of the automatic pistol, often working in secret, a war of assassinations in which men were murdered in their beds, or fell, shot from behind, on the pavement of a street. In his speeches at Paisley my father criticised this appalling state of affairs, and he also suggested a remedy. In his view the main causes of the trouble were the imposition of conscription on Ireland and the postponement of Home Rule: there had been an excellent opportunity of solving the problem in April 1918, but that chance had been missed. He had warned the Government at that time that to impose conscription would strengthen the revolutionary movement in Ireland at the expense of the constitutional movement. His warning was neglected; the Conscription Bill was passed, Home Rule was postponed, and a golden chance was missed; the Irish people thought themselves befooled and rallied round the flag of the revolutionary party. The solution which he suggested was Dominion Home Rule: 'What possible interest has Ireland,' he asked, '—once she has



H. H. A. AND AUGUSTINE BIRRELL AT THE WHARF

got what she needs and what she ought to have, namely, the power of managing her own affairs on her own soil, according to her own wishes, by her own children, her own sons and daughters—what possible interest has she in cutting herself adrift and abandoning her share in the greatest inheritance to be found among the nations of the world?'

Dominion Home Rule was denounced as 'lunacy' by Mr. Lloyd George in October 1920, but after so denouncing it, he accepted the idea himself in the Treaty of December 1921 which set up the Irish Free State. If the suggestion had been accepted, when it was made by Asquith two years before, it would have saved many lives, much bitterness, a large part of that crowning tragedy in the long unhappy story of the two islands.

Political history during the last phase of his life is a matter of recent memory and here its details need not be recalled. In 1924, when he lost his seat at Paisley, Mr. Baldwin wrote him a delightful letter: 'I think you would have felt pleased,' he wrote, 'if you could have heard the genuine expressions of regret and sympathy which were uttered spontaneously by typists and lift boys working in the Unionist Central Offices.'

A few days later my father received a letter from the King, offering him a peerage, and written with great delicacy and kindness in the interval between the two Governments. My father requested time to reflect on this offer and went abroad with his son Arthur to the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, paying visits to Egypt and the Sudan, Palestine and Syria. At Assouan he worked in his room in the morning and during the week that he stayed there, wrote 14,000 words of his book *Fifty Years of Parliament*. He admired the ruins

of Baalbec; but he was critical of the landscape in the Sudan, and in one of his moods of disparagement he described Palestine as 'an arid, rocky, hummocky, treeless expanse, with ranges of hills here and there rising to no great height.'

On his return he accepted the King's offer: he was given the earldom of Oxford and Asquith and later in the year he was made a Knight of the Garter, an honour which he had refused at the end of the War.

The cleavage between the two wings of the Liberal Party, which beneath the surface had never been healed, again became obvious at the time of the General Strike in 1926: on this issue my father supported the Conservative Government; in his view the strike was 'an offence of the gravest kind', being an attempt 'to coerce the whole community and to substitute for the authority of Parliament that of a class dictatorship'. Mr. Lloyd George, on the other hand, shewed sympathy with the strikers and made a violent attack on the Government. In my father's view the cleft had now become too wide to bridge: the separation in principles, in organisations, and in party funds made his position impossible, and in October 1926, a few weeks after his seventy-fourth birthday, he resigned the leadership which he had held for eighteen years.

In a speech made at Greenock after his resignation he defined the principles of Liberalism, as he understood them. In his view Liberalism had two 'root principles': the first was the preservation and extension of liberty in every sphere of national life, the second was the subordination of class interests to the interests of the community. 'Liberty', he said, 'in our understanding of it, means liberty in its positive as well as its negative

sense. A man is not free unless he has had the means and opportunities for education. A man is not free unless he is at liberty to combine with his fellows for any lawful purpose in which they have a common interest. Nor is there real freedom in industry if it is carried on under conditions which are injurious to those whom a man employs, or with whom he works, or to the health and well-being of his neighbours. The liberty of each is circumscribed by the liberty of all.' He then came to the second principle, the subordination of class interests to the general good: 'It matters nothing,' he said, 'for our purpose whether the class which is seeking for a privileged or paramount position is great or small; whether it relies upon birth, or wealth, or numbers and organisation; whether its mouthpiece is, for the time being, the Duke of Northumberland or Mr. Cook. The good of all in our view is, in the long run, the good of each: we are all members of one another.' It was for this reason that the General Strike was a negation and a defiance of the articles of the Liberal creed.

I suggested to him that he should publish a volume of his speeches, and of this collection, chosen under his own supervision, the speech of the resignation of his leadership is the last in the book, forming, as it were, a kind of political testament.

There can be little doubt that Liberalism, as a principle of positive freedom, giving the power of individual enterprise and adventure, is interwoven as a strand in the island nature of the English: in one form or another it has shewn itself through many centuries; one aspect of it is the idea of self-government, an idea that binds the peoples of the Empire more strongly than formal

bonds. Among the people this sense is inherent, not depending on the existence of a party machine or failing with the exhaustion of a party fund.

At the beginning of the General Strike one or two lorries appeared in the streets of London, carrying large notices inscribed 'By permission of the T.U.C.'; but among the crowd of traffic another car was seen, far more typical of the English: it was driven by a private citizen and it bore, chalked upon its bonnet in bold flowing letters, the inscription, 'By permission of my own bl—dy self'. It was a midget car, but it carried a great message, worthy of the land of Drake.

Looking back now through the past, Asquith could claim that he had applied his two principles in practice, and often on a large scale: by his factory legislation he had improved the lot of workers and by his scheme for Old Age Pensions he had relieved them from some of their anxieties, the depressing goal of poverty that had waited for them at the end of their lives; when in his view the members of a particular class were threatening the benefit of all, he had opposed them whether they were rich or poor, in one case by the Parliament Act, in another by his resistance to the General Strike. Thirty-five years before the outbreak of Civil War in Ireland he had supported a measure of moderate Home Rule. In the sphere of Empire he had assisted to lay the foundations for the Union of South Africa, and he had led England, her dominions, and her colonies, as a united family into the Great War.

But during this last phase deep changes were taking place in the substance of politics. In Europe and Asia, as the floods of war receded, they revealed, one by one, the rockbound reefs of the dictatorships; and in

England, though old forms and names were still preserved, there was a tendency now for the historic parties to draw together in order to defend a joint inheritance against the extremists of Communism on the one flank, and Fascism on the other. Moderate opinion, Conservative or Liberal, did not welcome the idea that men should become cogs and levers in a machine, and neither side was inclined to make the State into a god or to worship a party government.

3

In the summer during these later years my wife and I often used to visit the Wharf by water, rowing down from Bablockhithe or from Oxford. It is a very pleasant method of travel, avoiding dust, the hooting of horns, the vapours of petrol and the sense of machinery, but in September we found that very few people were using it except ourselves. My father definitely preferred to travel by road, and to the end of his life he was fond of motoring: but he was not averse to a short voyage on the river, and more than once I remember rowing him on a warm night along the reach that leads to Abingdon, firmly seated, in reflective mood, with the steering ropes in his hands, and bulking rather largely in the stern of a perilously narrow boat with the Thames sliding by beneath the gunwale.

His visits to the golf-links became rarer during this period of his life, but now and then I played a game with him at Huntercombe: his applewood putter had been ancient when he first acquired it, but now another thirty years had been added to its age; its appearance had a definite moral effect and his opponents in four-

somes sometimes trembled before it, as it was drawn from his bag, its head toned and mellowed to the colour of a well-seasoned pipe; for even in these later days, though the rest of his game was far from good, he still used this club with his old steadiness and skill, performing that most trying of strokes, the holing of a four-foot putt, with a regularity which far exceeded the average. His driving had never been good and when his ball struck the face of a hazard or trickled over its lip, his usual formula 'Just caught' seemed to attribute mobility not to the ball but to the bunker; he seemed to regard it not as a passive obstacle, but as a species of predatory animal, a tiger which had suddenly pounced out on its innocent victim.

He still showed his old interest in the stage, and after the performance at the Everyman Theatre of a play by his daughter Elizabeth,[1] he gave a supper party to those who had acted in it, at his house in Bedford Square.

A play which he enjoyed very much, was an unpublished work of Sir James Barrie, which was written for private theatricals at Stanway, the home of Lord and Lady Wemyss at the foot of the Cotswold Hills. The actors were Lord Wemyss and some of his grandchildren, two of whom were also grandchildren of my father. The hall at Stanway has a high latticed window with many hundreds of panes, mellowed with time, and when the sun shines through them, its rays are tinged with a deeper gold of varying tints as though they were pouring through the slice of a honey-comb. The play was performed on a stage not far from this window, but the time was Christmas, the sun had gone down, and those dappled lights of honey and amber had

[1] Princess Antoine Bibesco.

departed some time before the curtain rose on the first act.

It was a light and merry work, a satire of detective melodrama, written for children, but there were many situations and passages of dialogue that could not have been composed by another hand. One situation especially pleased my father and he often referred to it afterwards: the villain, 'Slimey Way-lay', by means of a trick, has induced the father of the unhappy heroine to allow him to marry her: the audience, seeing the bride led in great distress to the altar, expects every moment a rescue, but no rescue comes; the wretched girl half falls in woe as the ring is put on her finger; and when she has signed the register, and is bound, soul and body, to Slimey, it seems now that even a regiment of horse could not separate these two in a way that would entirely satisfy the moral sense of the audience. But Barrie succeeded in doing so by a device of startling novelty, of which I do not know a parallel in detective fiction, which led to a complete reversal of the whole situation, the villain falling in a moment from the height of triumph to an abyss of the most awful discomfiture.

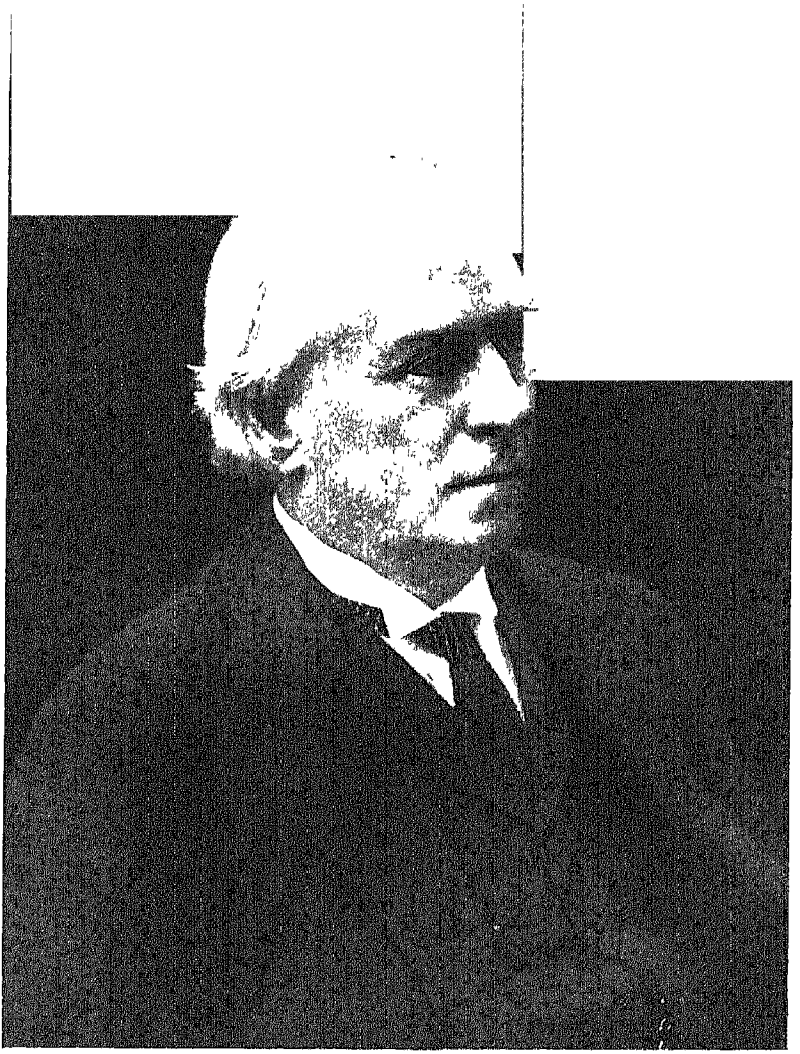
A large part of my father's later years was occupied with authorship as well as politics, and it was during this period that he wrote most of his longer books. *The Genesis of the War* was published soon after the Peace; then came *Fifty Years in Parliament*, and finally *Memories and Reflections*, which he never had time to revise or complete.

Occasional Addresses and *Studies and Sketches* contain some of his more considered views on literature and give a clue to some of the subjects which appealed to

his taste. Criticism, Biography, Ancient Universities and the Modern World, the English Bible, Papal History in the time of the Borgias, Popular Frenzies in the Eighteenth Century, Dr. Johnson and Fanny Burney, the poetry of Sir Henry Wotton, the art of Tacitus, the age of Demosthenes, and also the age of Queen Victoria, are some of his themes, and give a rough indication of the range of his interests.

Boswell's *Life of Johnson* often lay on a table near his bed, and it was clear both from his talk and his essays that it was one of his favourite books: but like many others, he had a low opinion of the Doctor's powers as a critic of literature. In his Address on Criticism my father quotes as instances of Johnson's fallibility, the well-known passage in which he dismisses *Lycidas* as 'easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting,' and his comment on 'the man Sterne': 'Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last.' But in some degree my father tempered his criticism by reminding his audience that Goethe, when asked his opinion of Dante, had replied that he thought 'the *Inferno* abominable, the *Purgatorio* dubious, and the *Paradiso* tiresome': in 1828 Jeffrey had delivered the astounding judgment that 'Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth are melting fast from the fields of vision', and Carlyle, speaking of the Waverley Novels, had said that they 'opened the floodgates to a Noah's deluge of ditchwater.'

Though my father did not indulge in personal invective himself, he enjoyed the choicer specimens of this art, when it was practised by others: several instances are scattered through his essays not only in the sphere of letters but also in that of theological conflict, a subject whose many ironies made a queer appeal to his mind;



Elliott & Fry

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he reminded his audience on one occasion that Toplady, the Calvinist author of " Rock of Ages ", spoke of John Wesley as ' a low and puny tadpole in divinity,' and that Rowland Hill, another Calvinist leader, described him as a ' designing wolf . . . as unprincipled as a rook and as silly as a jackdaw.'

My father's life had been spent in such a succession of tumults that it is not surprising he should have chosen as the theme for one of his addresses ' Some Popular Frenzies in the Eighteenth Century ' and as the motto, ' *Tumultuositas vulgi insaniae proxima* '. One of the frenzies which he described was the popular agitation in favour of Wilkes, when the Austrian ambassador, one of the most stately and ceremonious of men, was dragged from his coach and ' 45 ' was chalked on the soles of his shoes. In the same tumults the windows of the Mansion House were broken and the houses of several peers were attacked by the crowd, but in my father's time, though for a different cause, the militant suffragettes had gone as far and perhaps further than this: though they had not assaulted an ambassador, they had often, with a variety of missiles, tried to assault a Prime Minister; and though they had never broken the windows of the Mansion House, they had committed an even great profanity by smashing the glass of the Venus of Velasquez.

One of his subjects of study during spare moments was the history of the Papacy, and in his essay on ' The Last Crusade ' his theme is the Church in Italy during the later half of the Sixteenth Century. It is a long way from John Wesley to Pope Sixtus the fourth and Cardinal Borgia, afterwards Alexander the sixth; this part of Papal History was one of my father's subjects

of study during his spare moments, and authorities on it were often to be found on his table. In his essay on 'The Last Crusade', he describes that singular and infamous episode when with the connivance of Sixtus the fourth, the Medici brothers were stabbed at High Mass in the Duomo at Florence at the moment when the Host was being elevated by Cardinal Riario, 'a bastard son of a bastard son of the Pope.' Giuliano was killed, Lorenzo was wounded; and in retribution the Archbishop of Pisa, one of the ringleaders of the plot, was hanged forthwith, and dangled on his rope, in episcopal robes, from a window of the Palazzo Vecchio.

My father liked the flavour of Gibbon's irony and there are passages in these essays which shew a tinge of his influence. There is also a tone of modesty, a regretful consciousness that the author, owing to the press of active affairs, had less time than he would have liked for the spadework of research. He sometimes told a story of a caustic comment made by a Scotch judge upon a long-winded advocate, that he 'exhausted time and encroached upon eternity.' In his own criticism of books he was much influenced by his fondness for the classic form and for conciseness of diction and he criticised De Quincey, whom he admired in other ways, for his 'incurable and often intolerable prolixity.'

But his love of clarity did not prevent him from admiring Browning, whom he held in the highest honour; the valiant optimism of the poet may well have appealed to a strong vein of optimism in the statesman, which was often apparent to his friends both in public and private life. It was typical of his nature that he should dislike self-consciousness in an author, and on this ground he criticises De Quincey because, 'whether

he praises or blames, admires or disparages, you never feel that he has lost himself in his subject, but always that he wishes to interest you in the subject because it interests himself.'

I once thought of arranging a meeting between my father and D. H. Lawrence, and I have always been rather regretful that it never took place. However widely divergent their points of view and their methods of approaching reality, I should like to have seen this encounter between a statesman whose intellect had been applied to the problems of action, and a poet who wished to found an ideal community on earth.

4

A few years after the War my father moved to 44 Bedford Square, leaving, with deep regret, the old house in Cavendish Square where he had lived since the early 'nineties. His library in the new house was a cool, secluded room at the back, far away from the traffic; tiers of books, many of them dating from his Oxford days, rose nearly to the ceiling, and on his writing-table near the window his ever-increasing collection of mementoes and midget crystal figures was assembled on either side of the inkstand.

A curious episode once happened outside the windows of the dining-room which was on the ground-floor: King George the Fifth and Queen Mary had done him the honour of coming to luncheon, and soon after they had entered the house, an enormous dustcart drew up near the kerb outside, completely obscuring the view. A footman went out onto the pavement and told the man confidentially that the King and Queen were

within: but he was not a credulous dustman, and it seemed to him to be contrary to any theory of odds that the King should be present at that particular spot in Bedford Square on the same day and at the very hour which he had chosen himself for discharging his duties. There was talk on the pavement; efforts at persuasion; attempts to rouse his faith; but he was still jovial, and still incredulous. His attitude resembled that of the British workman who, according to the story, found himself sitting near a Rajah on the top of an omnibus. In a moment of adventure the Rajah had mounted the bus in western dress, but he had forgotten his purse, and the workman offered to pay his fare. The Rajah thanked him with the deepest courtesy, requested his name and address, and at the same time revealed who he was.

'All right, matey,' said the workman with a festive wink; 'I'm the Tsar of all the Roosias myself!'

My father was often attracted by natures which were in a sense complementary to his own: since the days when he had visited George Meredith at Box Hill, and before that, he had liked the company of men of letters: one reason was that he liked good talk, but another cause, perhaps going deeper than this, was the relief of contrast, the change from a life of action. 'That he was a scholar and would have made an admirable historian was clear to all,' writes Mr. Desmond MacCarthy, one of his nearer friends; 'but that he was a scholar, or historian, pitch-forked into active life, is, I believe, an utterly false reading of him. I knew him during twelve years. . . . This was at any rate sufficient to enable me to form a positive opinion about his nature, and my conclusion was that the caste of his

intellect and imagination was essentially that of a man of action.' Both avenues had lain open to him in his youth, but without hesitation he had chosen that which led to practical issues.

He had a good repertoire of pointful stories, but his conversation was often terse in quality, and his habit of practical decision made him inclined to ask questions as though he desired to inform himself rather than his friends. He did not often play tennis with words, or toss a proposition into the air, but he would often do this with a question or a conundrum, glancing round the company with mellow expectancy to see whether anyone could give him an answer.

In the little dining-room of the Wharf opening on the lawn, with the deep blue skies of the Italian pictures glowing on the walls above, there were at different times many contrasts of personalities, but few were more entertaining than that of my father and his friend, Mr. Desmond MacCarthy: to those who knew the signs of the weather it was clear that my father enjoyed the quality of this talk, which somehow brought to my mind the picture of a stalwart ship of the eighteenth century, lifting and falling on the swell, with the wavelets playfully tossing their plumes and rippling past the beam. There were many other men, whose conversation he enjoyed in these later days, notably, perhaps, Augustine Birrell and Professor Gilbert Murray; and the talk of his son-in-law, Prince Antoine Bibesco, now and then administering a subtle prick to British complacencies, often appealed to his sense of humour.

G. K. Chesterton in his Autobiography has given a description of a meeting with my father: 'Though our conversations were light and even flippant,' writes

Chesterton, 'he was one who rose gloriously to flippancy. Once when he appeared in Court dress, on some superbly important occasion, an uncontrollable impulse of impertinence led me to ask whether the Court sword would really come out of its sheath. "Oh, yes," he said, shaking a shaggily frowning head at me, "do not provoke me".' Between such champions as these a duel with words—and even more with swords—would certainly have drawn spectators.

My father took a great interest in any story that threw a light on the human traits of his friends: such stories are often tinged with a light malice, not entirely at play, but he was quick to distinguish the shadow from the reality, a thing which could never appeal to him. His character, like his mind, was moulded on large lines; it had a grand simplicity which excluded by its nature anything that was small or mean. His armoury was strong and formidable; but he usually held his weapons in reserve, and he did not often draw them in private life. Those who knew him best thought that apart from the power of his intellect his most prominent qualities were generosity, kindliness and magnanimity.

In his early days, when I first remember him, he was fond of coining nicknames for his children and his friends, and he was always fond of using them, but now the mintage was usually done by others. He liked watching charades and any form of mimicry, and these enjoyments were part of his general zest for life. The 'intellectual economy' which Henry James had noticed in his talk during a luncheon in time of war, though frequent, was far from invariable; as a rule he preferred to draw out what others had to say, and he did not

like to regard conversation as a strenuous form of exercise, but there were moments, when he seemed suddenly to turn on a light at full power, and one was conscious then of a flash of penetration and a deep store of knowledge, lying behind, hidden in reserve.

During most of his life as well as during these later years he had a large number of women friends: like many men who have been spending their day in male discussions or in reaching decisions on the problems of great affairs, he found in feminine company a new angle of vision, a delightful change of perspective that relaxed and amused his mind, a holiday from the dust. In the circle of his family his daughters, Violet and Elizabeth, shewed a sure instinct in telling him anecdotes which they knew would appeal to his palate, and he took an obvious pleasure in listening to the witty talk of his wife who remained to the end his constant and gallant defender.

When he was discussing the subject of novels written by women, he once went so far as to suggest that a feminine novelist of the first order ought never to marry, as such a course was bound to divide her allegiance between her art and her children. In support of his view he cited a formidable list of unmarried authors, including Jane Austen, Christina Rossetti, and Emily and Charlotte Brontë, the last of whom had produced her most notable work before her marriage. He admitted that there were exceptions to his theory, but maintained that there were few married women during the nineteenth century who could compare to the standard of these names. The suggestion that if they remained single, there might be a shortage of good novelists during the next generation would no doubt

have been brushed aside on the ground that genius is not inherited.

His spare time was very largely devoted to literature, but I rarely heard him discuss a problem of philosophy. During these later years I remember one occasion when the conversation suddenly turned to the subject of psychical research and the value of the evidence it had supplied on the question of the survival of the soul: he seemed to listen with interest, but he did not take much part in the discussion, and at the end of it he suddenly lifted his head and said that he thought we were 'not meant to know' what happened on the other side of death.

He was on the whole optimistic about this world, often in the face of great discouragement, and I think his hopefulness extended into a future beyond it. Some light is thrown on his attitude by a passage in one of his essays: he observes that the earthquake at Lisbon had troubled the faith of the boy Goethe and even undermined 'the optimistic Deism of Voltaire,' but he quotes as 'a highly sagacious remark' the comment made by Archbishop Herring that for his own part he thought "the rising and setting of the sun a more durable argument for religion than all the extraordinary convulsions of nature put together."

5

For most of his life my father had seemed almost immune from illness, except now and then a slight cold or something equally trivial. But the strength even of an iron constitution, especially when it has been exposed to such heavy stresses as his, often hangs upon something

slighter than a hair. In June 1926 he had a sudden loss of power in his legs which prevented him from being able to walk; but from this affliction, after a short time, he seemed to recover. Early in 1927 one of his legs was again affected; from this, once more, he seemed to be making recovery, and in the autumn, when I saw him at North Berwick and on the links near Gosford, he was able to walk for short distances and even hoped again to play a game of golf. But this was not to be. On returning to the Wharf from a visit to Norfolk he was unable to get out of his car and was confined to his bed in a room on the ground floor.

During the summer of 1927, before he took to his bed, he used to be taken into the garden in a wheeled chair; at this time he was writing his book *Memories and Reflections*, which was never finished, and he had much to think of then, as he looked back into the past: the figures of Gladstone and Rosebery, Haldane, and Wright, his early benefactor; the continuous presence of Ireland; his own relentless pursuit of Chamberlain from speech to speech; the bitter struggle over the Parliament Bill; his visit to the Palace to call the King from his bed in the early hours of the morning, just before the outbreak of war; waiting with Grey in the Cabinet room during the last minutes of peace until the clock struck that fateful hour, and the moment came for flashing the War order to the Fleet; Kitchener going home to change his clothes and hastening to Paris to prevent French from retiring behind the Seine; the news of Raymond's death; the long drag of the War; his own fall from power, and at the end of it all—the Treaty of Versailles. There was certainly much to think of,

as he was wheeled down that garden path, looking backward through the years.

During this summer at the Wharf I sometimes walked at the side of his chair: his intellect was clear and his memory was good as ever, except now and then in the case of very recent events. One day in particular I remember, when he was being wheeled near the edge of the flowers: swallows were skimming the river and the sound of distant bells came down over the water; they were not the bells of Oxford, to which he had gone as a young man, but Oxford was not far away, and the water in front of him where the swallows were hunting, had flowed beneath her bridges. His thoughts seemed to go back far into the past, beyond the hard contests of his life, and he talked now and then about early days in that other garden in Keats Grove, where he had played cricket with his sons more than forty years before. Since those days he had had a long journey, if it were reckoned by years, but longer still when it was measured by its intensity, by the tramp of great events, and the storms that had broken above.

This was his last summer and he did not live to see another Spring: he died on the 15th of February 1928 at the age of seventy-five. A memorial to him was put up in Westminster Abbey, but he was buried, at his own wish, with great simplicity, in the churchyard of an English village.

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